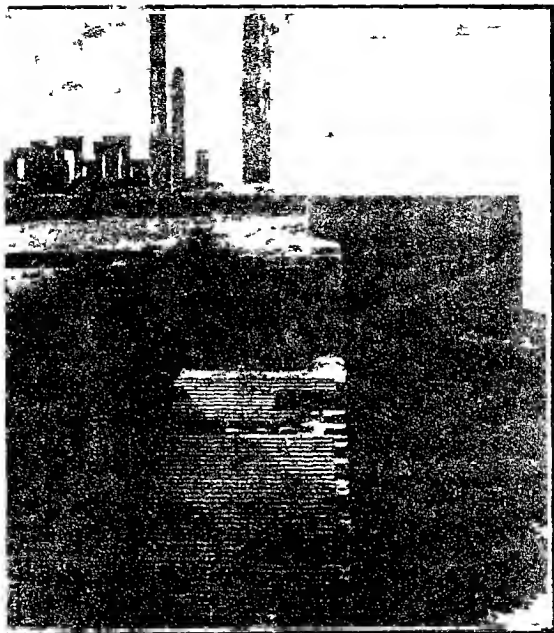




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RUINS OF PERSEPOLIS

# THE LIGHT OF ANCIENT PERSIA

BY

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THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE

ADYAR, MADRAS, INDIA

1923

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IN PROUD MEMORY  
OF  
MY BELOVED FATHER BEJANJEE  
THROUGH WHOM  
I INHERITED  
THE LIGHT OF ANCIENT PERSIA



## INTRODUCTION

WHILE striving to estimate the cultural unity of the continent of Asia, no one can ignore Ancient Persia. The study of the language, literature and religious system of the Persian Aryans is important to all students of comparative philology. In some of the universities of Europe and of India *Avesta* forms part of the syllabus of philosophy for the highest degree in Arts. And to-day, in the tremendous renaissance movement which is stirring the whole world, Persia must secure an honourable place. In fact Persia was, and must still be, a link between the eastern and western civilisations.

Ancient Persia can be happily associated with the light of religion, science and art,



which was kindled at a time when the modern "civilised" countries were in darkness. That Light was cast from the heavenly heights through the prophet, Zoroaster. To-day the Zoroastrian Empire is gone, but the Light of Persia remains. To-day the world knows little of Zoroaster, but is anxious to ascertain the political standing of Persia.

The few followers of the Prophet, who inhabit the globe, are scattered far and wide, but they one and all love to turn to the Light whenever they invoke their deity, Ahura Mazda. For His worship they turn to the rising sun in the east, and to the setting sun in the west; at night they commune with Him through other luminaries or through the homely light of the hearth and the lamp, as well as in the Fire Temples. In fact God can be sought through light or lustre wherever it is found in the Universe. The Light of Zoroastrianism now lies hidden in the crumbling pages of the

*Zend-Avesta*, which the descendants of the Ancient Persians in India and Persia have striven to preserve.

•To-day their pride is, and should be, in the *Avesta*. It is a work of ripe thought, eloquent and inspiring. It is the book of divinity for a universal religion. Great Persian kings and queens have come and gone; Persian palaces have shone brightly and are no more; Zoroastrian power is extinct; but Zoroastrians still live and die in the tenets of their Faith. The sacred altars of Zoroastrian Persia have either been razed to the ground or turned into alien temples of worship; but the pious Zoroastrian priests have kept the Light burning in their holy *Atashbeherams*.

Many rays of that Light streamed into other parts of the world, and an attempt has been made in this book to recover and unite them in order that we of the modern age may re-light our little lamps with the ancient Light.

It has been often said by critics that if the religious education of Parsi boys and girls is to be earnestly attempted, all works on Zoroastrianism should be published only in the mother-tongue, namely, Gujarati prose. But, if I have ever received any substantial help and encouragement in my task of popularising the *Zend-Avesta*, it has been I must say, not from the mass of my community, but from generous patrons of learning, both Parsee and non-Parsee. Besides, truly speaking, the Parsees, like the Swiss, have no mother-tongue. If the Parsee nationalists must read in Gujarati, books enough have already been published in that language for all of them. For my part, I do not profess to publish herein any very original material as an addition to the Parsee-Gujarati literature. My aim has been to present in a readable and attractive form all that is of the very best in Zoroastrianism and Ancient Persia, as far as possible. Mine is the mission

of collecting at least some of the rays of the Light of Iran and passing them on to the rising generation. And if I give my share, in however small a measure, to the great international movement which is being fostered by *New India* at present, through the medium of a language which not only a few Parsee friends but also millions of earnest students the world over can understand, my efforts will not have been in vain. May Ahura Mazda prosper them, and may He bless those who have helped me in my studies. I have particularly to thank my friend, Professor A. R. Wadia, B.A., LL.B. (Cantab.), Bar-at-Law, of the Mysore University, for kindly going through the manuscript, and the Theosophical Publishing House for honouring me with a place among the authors of their *Asian Library Series*.

May all the Asian nations rapidly regain their prestige in the modern world!

*Karachi*  
June 13, 1923

M. P.



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## CHAPTER I

### ZOROASTER IN THE GATHAS

IN these days of exceptional material progress, of modern civilisation with its scientific achievements, Zoroaster and other old-world teachers might be deemed out-of-date. "What earthly use," the twentieth century hero might say, "is there in turning to the light of an ancient nation?" safe as he is amidst the splendours of the new world. In an age of great discoveries and inventions, culminating in the most intricate flying-machines and wireless telegraphy, how much can the age-worn pages of the *Zend-Avesta* help a restless soul? But, however antiquated the Hymns of Zoroaster may be, however remote the times

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when Persia held sway over many countries, Ancient Iran can, as a Mother of mothers, teach the modern world some sound lessons in wisdom and truth. With righteousness and faith within her heart, she can still deliver messages which the modern world must hear with patience. And so even the modern Parsees should never be ashamed of their ancient system of religion and morality. As late as 1882, Colonel Henry S. Olcott told the Parsees of Bombay:

Within the husk of modern religion there is the shining soul of the old Faith that came to Zardust and once illuminated the whole trans-Himalayan world. Your religion is in agreement with the most recent discoveries of modern science and the freshest graduate of the Elphinstone College has no cause to blush for the ignorance of Zardust!

And in the same strain David Amman declares:

Should modern science deem it worthy, and be able to understand the real meaning of the spirit of the Avesta, it would soon find out that Zoroaster

knew of all the laws and operations of Nature far better than all the philosophers, scientists and astronomers of to-day. Galileo, Newton, and Kepler would have had to learn from their master astronomer. Darwin would be put to shame if he understood the theory of evolution as taught by Zoroaster. Practically all the precepts of poetry, all moral and religious exercises, all sacrifices and healing were based upon the deepest and profoundest studies of Nature's laws in all domains—physical, spiritual and intellectual.

Zoroastrianism has been tested by the touchstone of Time and has proved to be a mine of spiritual gold. Zoroaster is a true prophet, he taught not for one age or for one people, but for all ages and all peoples.

Prophets are bearers of religious torches, eternally inspired by their great ideals. The ideal of purity and light taught by Zoroaster of Iran, the ideal of perfect sacrifice taught by Jesus of Nazareth, the ideal of renunciation and selflessness taught by the Buddha of Gaya, and that of unity by the Prophet of Mecca are all Undying Lamps for every age

and for every country. Imperfect as we are, we need to be reminded again and again of these laws of life. Man needs these ideals to complete the great cycle of evolution from the thoughtless and speechless creature to the divinely inspired genius. Zarthustra forms a connecting link between *geti* (this world) and *minoi* (the next) for all mankind to follow. He is so much an outstanding figure as to impress upon the teeming millions of the modern world the great goal of perfection. Does not the world need such a reminder to-day?

*Zoroaster and Nature.*—The answer is not far to seek. One of the greatest discoveries which Zoroaster made in the beginning of his prophetic career was *Asha*<sup>1</sup> (sk. *Rita*), the Law of Righteousness and Cosmic Order, to which the whole universe perpetually responds. It is a law that governs not only the myriads

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxviii, 5.

of heavenly bodies in the firmament but also the physical and moral affairs of our own world; not only the birth, growth and death of all animate beings but also the coming and passing away of Mahatmas and Prophets. Zarthustra himself was appointed to his earthly task only in accordance with this Law.<sup>1</sup> Amidst the pangs and doubts suffered by humanity at large, Nature and her laws are its truest friends. Of such laws the Iranian prophet was a great exponent and he had the keen vision of a great seer. All our discoveries and inventions, all our ideals of progress and perfection are not accidents or whims, but are the outcome of a Central Oneness round which the Universe revolves and evolves; hence the doctrine of the Brotherhood of all living beings and the Fatherhood of Ahura Mazda.

*Holy Fire.*—The next great discovery was of the Holy Fire, the living element without

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxix, 8, 9, 10, 11.

which the Universe would remain but dead matter. Fire is a simple word of four letters but in its meaning it spells the whole of our world. There is a volume in that monosyllabic word; to name it even is enough to create wonder and awe in mankind. It stands for the law of the conservation of energy and therefore for Ahura or the Living Being.

The sacred fire is mentioned with great respect in the Hymns of Zoroaster. Heat and light are the very soul of life. Light is given by God to man in order that he may enjoy the heat of His breath and be blessed by His spirit. The rays of light penetrate all matter through the ether of space, and hence Ahura Mazda and His representative on earth, Atash, are omnipresent.

In a few remarkable places in the Hymns the element of fire is referred to. "May the strength of the Holy Mind come unto me through the warmth of Thy Asha-induced

fire!"<sup>1</sup> And again, "As long as there is desire in me, so long shall I consider the gift of righteous adoration of Thy fire."<sup>2</sup> The light produced from this Holy Fire is also the source of delight,<sup>3</sup> which is clearly seen and experienced by the followers of the Prophet; and in one other strophe the Spiritual Fire or the Holy Ghost, if you will, is described as "powerful, swiftest, courage-giving, world-gladdening, and detecting deceit and falsehood".<sup>4</sup> Where there is Light, there is no ignorance, no blunder, no hypocrisy, and no undue influence. Therefore there is no cause whatever for a reformer to grumble at this refined "idolatry of fire". Rather he is safer in the old Temple of Light than in his own palace of darkness. It is even possible for him to receive currents from the reservoir of electrical energy stored up in

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xliii, 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xliii, 9.

<sup>3</sup> „ xxxi, 3.

<sup>4</sup> „ xxxiv, 4.



the flames and continually kept alive by the Avestan influence. Where has the modern world gone wrong then? A prophet who sacrificed himself for ideal purity of body, mind and soul would be least inclined towards people who create an atmosphere of smoke. The tobacco evil is one of the greatest in our modern times, and in order to keep the air clear, allowing the lungs to act freely, and to preserve the element holy, the rule of Zoroastrianism must always hold sway. Even from a purely hygienic point of view, which is one principle of Zoroastrianism, smoking is an evil which should be stopped in the very youth of humanity.

*In the Animal World.*—For the founder of a universal religion the world of lower beings is closely connected with mankind. In a beautiful Hymn the creed of a Zoroastrian is thus defined: "Of that faith and creed we declare ourselves to be as are the waters,

vegetations and animals of good creation, and Ahura Mazda, who made the earth and the holy men, as was Zarthusra, as were Kae Gushtasp, Frashoshtra, Jamaspa and every one of the Asha-practising and holy benefactors of the world".<sup>1</sup> This clearly shows the close relationship of God's various creations and the law of evolution working through them.

A prophet, who adopted a name that conveyed the significance of the greatest service in Ancient Persia—*Ushtra*, the "ship of the desert"—one who everywhere scattered seeds of kindness and love among the faithful, one who had as his life-motive work for God and Asha, could never be an advocate of butchery. The modern world wrongly claims its superiority over the lower animals, and takes foolish pride in hunting them down; but Zarthusra has distinctly said: "Those who injure the life of animals are bad in the eyes

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xii, 7.

of agriculture and work for Ahura Mazda. He was a farmer of the first rank, and in those days of nomadic life his word was a welcome antidote to the Semitic practice of butchery. The friendship of the animals and the fertility of the Persian soil helped the farmers a great deal to fulfil Zoroaster's message of work and worship. This farmer-prophet was the first in the world to preach the simple life; to him the modern world might listen with profit. Of all professions, agriculture is the most natural and suitable to man. The early Persians as well as the forefathers of Indian Parsees were expert farmers; and even to-day it is the plough (and not the charkha) that would give India her old strength and wealth. In fact, the world might with profit leave aside the complexities of life and turn once more to simple ways. All new sciences should be subordinated to this time-honoured art of nature-culture. The intricacies of

industrialism must melt before the simple and sublime mode of life. Zoroaster was beyond all doubt a practical teacher as well as an idealist, and he would to-day strongly uphold engineering skill for the sake of irrigation and such sciences and defy a failure of the monsoon. It is high time the modern world gathered all its mechanical and electrical appliances for the building of social and moral structures everywhere. This alone can save the present crisis in business and commerce.

*Teetotalism.*—With regard, let us say, to “Pussyfoot” Johnson’s campaign, scholars will be tempted to refer immediately to the ancient drink of *Homa* which is the same as the sanskrit *Soma*. But the *Avesta* must not be misunderstood; rather it is as clear as crystal: “All other intoxicants follow indeed the cruel demon of wrath, but he who drinks the *Homa* juice follows Asha in gladness.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, x, 8.

Anger, devastation and destruction were the results of intoxicating drinks in the early Aryan world, but the purified and consecrated juice of a healthy plant like *homa* gave inspiration and ecstasy to men. Hence the preparation of this drink had no connection with the distillation of *mowra*. But by a strange irony of fate some Parsees in India became wealthy by the liquor traffic. It is not pleasant, rightly says the spirit of Young India, for any one to rely upon his liquor reputation. Neither the mind nor the body can be kept pure thereby. Not till the modern traders co-operate with the teetotalers and non-co-operate with wine merchants, not till the modern world realises the horrors of drink and the benefit of abstinence, shall man be really great.

*Zoroaster and Modern Politics.*—This leads us on to the question of present-day politics. In these days of Home Rule cries and political

Non-co-operation, it is but fit to know what a great prophet has to say to us. Far from non-co-operating with the wicked world, he for many years struggled with the Drujas and Daevayasnians till he succeeded in converting them to his creed. For centuries Zoroastrians have believed in the righteous government of God and the monarchy of all good rulers. It was at the feet of King Gushtasp that the Prophet first put the first Avestan prize which he had brought from his high abode; and not till the Ruler of the country embraced his creed, was he able to move forward. History is clear on this point: no great religious movement has been a success in this world unless backed by a king or an emperor. It was the Empires at the back of Christianity that gave the religion of Jesus Christ a chance in the world. Zoroaster wants rulers—good rulers who can better the world by their wise government

and elevate the people. "May not the Dushkshathra rule over us!"<sup>1</sup> the Book says. Loyalty to the Almighty Creator and to the King of a country went hand in hand. It was Iran's fate that whenever it lost its Kingdom it fell into anarchy and irreligion.

The golden age of Zoroastrianism is synchronous with that of Kae Gushtasp. Many were the kings of Iran who followed in the footsteps of this "Constantine of the Avesta" and became the *Saoshyants*, or benefactors of the Faith. The Prophet, moreover, had blessed him: "May the sons born of thee live long!"<sup>2</sup> In no period in the history of Persia was there democratic or republican rule. On the contrary, Persia stood for generations as a model of successful monarchy to other western nations. "As time went on, even the Athenians began to realise their

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxxv, 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Yasht*, xxiii, 1.

mistake. Tired of the noisy instability of a democracy, writers like Xenophon turned regretfully to Ancient Persia for a better and more enduring model. To Xenophon, Cyrus is the ideal king, far surpassing Pericles and Alcibiades and the demagogues of his own land.”<sup>1</sup> It was only after the terrible blow given by Alexander to Darius III in 330 B.C. that Iran sank into insignificance for a time. Throughout the Ashkanian dynasty, and until the Kyanian glory once more revived under the Sassanian monarchs, Zoroastrianism remained in the background. Once more in the days of Ardesheer Babekan, Zoroaster’s conception of a Constituted Monarchy was grasped in the land of romance; and to this the dynasty adhered until the fall of the unlucky Yezdezard, the last Zoroastrian king, in A.D. 651, at the hands of the wandering Arabs. With him fell also Iran, its greatness

<sup>1</sup> *Rock Records of Darius*, p. 7.



and its Faith, the latter remaining in a chrysalis state until now, a period of twelve centuries. The Parsees, their lineal descendants, have been in India staunch in their Faith and loyal to the King, whether he happened to be the Hindu, Jadi Rana, or the Christian, Victoria the Good.

Zoroaster's principles of world-government are clearly seen in his conception of a Divine Hierarchy. Towering above all is the good Ahura Mazda. There were Asuras conceived before Him but the unity and union of nature was His first good thought. Then in the Assembly are the constituted Amesha Spentas or Archangels and Angels to whom the government is entrusted, in so many divisions of labour. In that oft-repeated Avestan song, "Yatha-ahu-varyo," it has been expressly stated that the aim of a good government is the preservation of the common people. "The Kingdom of Ahura is for him who gives to

the poor their daily bread." Of such government Zoroaster was always in favour.

Though he did not actually believe in the Divine Right of Kings, the throne of a righteous monarch was regarded by him as a symbol of earthly authority, of dignified simplicity and of public justice. It is also the opinion of sane politicians to-day that, "if the throne went, with its age-long traditions of culture and its rigid insistence on a certain standard of life, plutocracy would take its place and would reign as unchallenged as it does elsewhere".

## CHAPTER II

### THE COMING AND THE PASSING OF ZOROASTER

THE past is not dead. To give life to it is in the hands of those who are living to-day. There is no impassable barrier between the past and the present. We of the modern age are but inheritors of the past of which we must leave a legacy behind for the future. We are but casual visitors to this world performing the functions of intermediaries or connecting links between the two great seas of Time. So is it in the case of prophets and world-teachers. Prophets come and pass away at certain critical moments in the

world's history. The period before the birth of a human child is a period of enormous endurance, anxiety and pain. Similarly, the circumstances which necessitate the coming of a great prophet are always trying. The good Sidhartha, a Prince in a royal palace, sought Buddhahood as he saw the world miseries around him. The Christ was sent by the Father to represent Him on earth, when the race of Adam had lost all faith in Him. God appealed to His heavenly Host for a Redeemer. Our Lord Zoroaster comes when the world around us is in sore need of a spiritual healer and leader.

*The Coming.*—There is not the shadow of a doubt that the world had sunk into ignorance before the coming of Zoroaster. It was in fact starved, mentally, morally and spiritually. Good Thought was not in existence in the human mind. It must be clearly understood that, after creating the world, God continues

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His relationship between Himself and man from generation to generation. He takes part constantly in our joys, our griefs, our desires. In fact, He dwells amongst us for all time. A cry or a prayer delivered earnestly by mankind is sure to be heard by the Creator. Before the appointment of Zoroaster as the prophet of Ancient Persia, a cry was raised by Geush Urva (the Soul of the Universe) to Ahura Mazda the Creator and His heavenly Hosts in a prayer of sublime pathos as follows:

For whom have I been created? Who created me? On me there is anger, there is robbery, also cruelty, destruction, rashness and tyranny. There is none to save me from these except Ye; therefore show me the way of good work.<sup>1</sup>

This is the most powerful echo of the misery of the age and it would be heard by Him. In fact, which compassionate father has not heard a needy offspring's cries? Forthwith, the working of the universal

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxix, 1.

harmony is questioned, and the Lord God turns to Asha, His primeval Law of Cosmic Order, and puts a query :

Whom hast thou appointed the lord of the world, who can guard and rule over and prosper it ?<sup>1</sup>

On Asha's answering that there was no possible leader in this world from amongst mankind, Ahura Mazda points out :

That single soul, who here, I know  
Has to my word paid heed,  
Is Spitama Zarathustro ;  
He wills to preach my creed  
For Asha's sake and hence to him  
Command I give to plead.<sup>2</sup>

Thereupon Geush Urva cries out once again and complains that a more powerful lord was wanted and not the voice of a man. But this cry was baseless and the Creator, Who Himself could not violate the law of Asha by performing a miracle, allowed the world

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxix, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xxix, 6.

itself to take its natural course. From amongst mankind His choice fell on Zoroaster of the Spitama stock to be His representative on earth. Immediately the prophetic voice of the Lord Zoroaster is heard :

O Ahura Lord, O Asha, find  
Strength and status for my crew,  
That from the wharf of my good mind  
Goodliest life and joy accrue.<sup>1</sup>

Thus he seeks divine aid from the Maker, aid for his "great task"<sup>2</sup>—the betterment of the world. Thus is appointed Zoroaster, the prophet of mankind, in the dawn of human history. The Aryan race had settled down in Central Asia long before the advent of this prophet, and the worship of the elements was still in vogue. The religion of the early Aryans was far from being the religion of one God. This mission of a monotheistic faith

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxix, 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xxix, 11.

was Zoroaster's, probably before the social split of the Persian Aryans from the Indian Aryans in Airyanevæjō. There is, however, a haze round the exact date and place of Zoroaster's coming, but it is generally agreed that it must have been between 1000 and 2000 B.C., somewhere in the western parts of modern Persia, probably Urumia. Anyhow, it cannot be denied that Zoroaster was a historical personage. Many classical writers have recorded his name and fame. But it is from the Gathic Hymns, mostly composed by the prophet and sounding very much like the Rig Veda, that we can draw out a thumb-nail sketch of his own doings in this world; his songs breathe out with fervour the offering of his vital force, his body<sup>1</sup> and soul in the service of humanity. Holding in his hand the sacred and far-reaching light of Good Mind and Zealous Devotion, in the fulness of hope and

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxxiii, 14.



courage he takes up his high office ; the bright morning of Khordad Sāl sees Zoroaster born ; the good struggle starts and the sacrificial duty begins.

Tradition gives many details of the unprecedented career of Lord Zoroaster on this earth ; as to how the pious Dogdhoë, his mother, dreamt of the coming babe ; how his laughter at birth filled the place with a dazzling light ; how his brain pulsated with an extraordinary effect ; how, envious of his rare appearance, the magicians headed by Daran Sarun put him to various ordeals but without success ; how he passed across the water Daiti ; how all the Archangels came to him as so many visions ; how miracles were performed by him before the court of King Gushtasp ; how he was maliciously cast into prison by the Wise Men ; and how, ultimately, Zoroaster sought immortality from Ahura Mazda. One passage from the “ Zarthost Nameh ” will suffice here :

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At that glad laughter all the room grew bright,  
His father praised God's glory, for his heart  
was light,  
As soon as they are born most children wail  
and weep,  
But he was calm and placid, as an infant's  
sleep.  
Envied that laughter then the women all,  
There was no gloom or mournful sorrow to  
recall.  
How did they covet, for his like they had not  
seen,  
Nor in the world had such a marvel ever been.  
And what would happen in the end none could  
surmise.  
Stung to the heart were all of the unclean,  
For in the world such infant never had been  
seen.  
With beauty and with laughter was the town  
replete,  
And sages all the wondrous story do repeat.  
Magicians in those days were many there  
And all their hearts were filled with anxious  
care.  
Thus to their minds there seemed to be a heavy  
blow,  
The child they all determined, from the world  
must go.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Ethics of Zoroaster*, by A. Rogers, p. 8.

But to return to the Avestan picture of the Prophet again. At the commencement of his career, not only mankind but the whole of Nature sympathises with his mission. An Avestan poet sings :

With his birth and with his growth  
Waters and trees grow rapturous ;  
With his birth and with his growth  
Waters and trees get prosperous ;  
With his birth and with his growth  
The Faith of Ahura, high in worth,  
Doth spread afar o'er foreign strands  
And Hafta-keshvar fields thenceforth.<sup>1</sup>

Then the wicked Drujas and Dævayasnians fearing their coming doom struggle vainly to harm the infant Zoroaster, but no injury could be done to him.

The wild cries and complaints of all opposing forces having settled down, Zoroaster begins his scholastic career with a prayer for inspiration and intuition :

<sup>1</sup> Farvardin Yast

"With uplifted hands of prayer I seek the wisdom of Good Mind for dedicating all holy deeds unto the bounteous spirit Ahura Mazda; thus and thus alone may I appease the soul of the world."<sup>1</sup>

Now as a pupil and then as a teacher, Zoroaster passes his early life in seeking knowledge, and in this struggle for self-education he appeals to Ahura Mazda for further aid. "Teach unto me," he says at one moment, "how the world was first created; for till the last shall I adhere to honesty of thought, word, and deed."<sup>2</sup> While at another time he eagerly repeats: "Let me hear Thy precious holy word, O omniscient and all-ruling Ahura Mazda!"<sup>3</sup>

Meditation, reflection, and inspiration are the prophet's special machinery for receiving

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxviii, 1

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xxviii, 11.

<sup>3</sup> " " 7.

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and delivering his immortal message to the world. "Of such a gift," he says, "I am in great need."<sup>1</sup>

So, like the meditating Buddha under the Bodhi tree, the Iranian Teacher seeks the aid of Vohu Mano, and then imbibes and inculcates the doctrine of Good Thought and a Great Ideal. At the foot of the fire altar and bathed in the rays of the divine Light which shines in his newly-created temple, he stands seeking knowledge and wisdom from every side, and when the stream of good thought does come to his mind, he is able to discover psychologically the religious Truth, moved as he is by the spirit of *Sraosha* (Obedience) operating on and through his great faculties.

It must be clearly grasped that in the case of the prophet of Iran there is no need of a direct and creative revelation. Zoroaster's chief mission is to verify, and not to create,

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxix, 11.

the moral law. His is not a heaven-sent Book of Revelation from the skies directly like rain. His inherent powers are remarkably developed by himself, and he lifts his spirit so high and to such an extent that he is able to hear the voice of God. For God does speak to such sensitive souls as are able to hear Him. This scientific and methodical reception of God's Holy Word is a revelation of the first order. Here is a flash of such an experience in Zoroaster's career :

Once when I have conceived of Thee with my mental eyes I have considered Thee as the Great Original, worthy of adoration, Father of Good Mind, Source of holiness and truth, and Lord of all earthly affairs. Bountiful humility is Thine alone. Thine is the wisdom of creating this world and Thou hast destined the paths for those that are world-workers and those that are not.'

Here is clearly revealed to the prophet the true nature of Ahura Mazda. His is then a new message, a message unheard before, and

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxxi, 8, 9.

so he is not only a reformer but a true prophet of humanity for all ages, bringing and spreading new light in the physical and spiritual worlds.

This accomplished, the prophetic career of Zoroaster really begins, with the further conceptions and visions of the archangelic virtues, on which he lays great stress if one wants to realise the true conception of God's kingdom. With high hopes he starts his noble work in the world. But it is strange that at the very threshold of his great career he meets with difficulties and troubles. He exclaims: "To which place shall I return? Which way should I take when my relations and friends forsake me? Neither my own workers nor the tyrannical rulers of the land please me. How shall I then please Thee in return O Lord?"<sup>1</sup> In an appealing strain Zoroaster strikes the

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xlv, 1.

key-note of all earthly travails and imperfections; "Know that I am disappointed. I have little help and scanty support. Thee I entreat, look to me, O Lord."<sup>1</sup> It is clear then that there was in the beginning a great opposition to Zoroaster's missionary work in the world. The Gathas are full of verses depicting the harm and hatred caused by evil-doers to his flock; useful cattle were tormented, the path of wisdom was shunned, and liars devastated the land by means of their falsehoods and wickedness.

It is here that Zoroaster is revealed to us as a *real*, living, struggling, sublime personage. Inasmuch as he sings from his own heart, inasmuch as he condescends from his lofty position of Prophet to live and struggle like an ordinary being, he comes close to the heart of humanity. Here we find Zoroaster an outstanding model of courage and

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xlvī, 2



perseverance. Here he shines not only as a World-Teacher but as a beloved friend of mankind.

With little aid from without but with enormous soul-force, heart within and Ahura Mazda overhead, he speeds on his lofty quest. To avoid the brunt of animosity, he for a while retires to heights and caves, and passes his time there in contemplation. Suddenly he becomes an inspired being again and a bright idea flashes across his mind. The river issuing from a majestic height loves to work its way weedy and steep down the slopes and, straining and struggling through valleys and over plains, ultimately to find its eternal shelter in the bosom of the ocean. So does this Messenger of Truth and Hope resolve to descend to the busy world again and to fight his holy fight himself. Zoroaster is a unique poet of optimism: for hope, bright, flaming, illumines his path wherever he goes.

The screen of gloom is raised and there appears before his mind a hope, an idea ; the king of the country must be sought and approached, and his aid secured for his divine Mission. Kae Gushtasp, the ruler of Eastern Iran, becomes his goal. Though it is a long way off, he appears before the court in a very short time and, after a brief period of argument and persuasion, then behold ! the King becomes the Prophet's best friend. Questions are put to him by the courtiers and *dasturs*, to all of whom he gives a thorough understanding of the groundlessness of *dæva*-worship, and appeals to them to work against that evil course. "The eternal law of 'Ill to the evil, pure blessings to the good'<sup>1</sup> holds good," he explains, "and applies both to the kingdom of God and that of Gushtasp." He perceives as in a vision this primeval law written on the gates of Paradise, shining out

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xliii, 1.

in splendour, and promising the struggling souls of the earth their reward in accordance with Ahura Mazda's just wisdom at the end of the Creation.

Soon the state drums beat triumphant notes for the Prophet, as, with the King, the chief courtiers embrace the Faith of Zoroaster.<sup>1</sup> With Gushtasp are easily won over Haechataspa, Frashoastira, Jamaspa, and Miadhyomaongha.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter the stream of success flows powerfully onward, and at a suitable stage Zoroaster holds a religious conference, and preaches a sermon :

Hear ye who have come from near and from far what I publicly say : listen to it attentively. Now ponder ye clearly over all this so that men of evil faith may not injure your souls a second time. <sup>3</sup>

Then he proceeds to expound his doctrine of *Spenta Mainyu* and *Anghra Mainyu*, Good

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xlvi, 14, 15 16, 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, li, 19

<sup>3</sup> „ xlv, 1.



MOUNT OF DAMAVEND



and Evil, philosophically, as to how evil predominates in a land where the human mind is perverted. Evil, in short, can be crushed, and the goal of perfection may be reached by man.

Now comes the period of repose, and in a unique soliloquy Zoroaster puts a series of questions to Ahura Mazda about His mysterious working in nature. He learns the great truths and secrets of nature by contemplation upon these problems, the solutions of which he finds in certain definite laws. On the heights of the Damavend or in the newly inaugurated Fire Temple he seeks Divine Wisdom—truths from the clouds that travel so swiftly across the sky, from the sun and stars that shine overhead, from the fire in volcanoes and from hot springs, from the moon that waxes and wanes day by day. Here is his nature-study translated from the Gathas :

38 THE LIGHT OF ANCIENT PERSIA

This Thee I ask,  
    speak forth aright, O Great Lord :  
Who holds up, yea,  
    this globe of earth and that sky  
From falling down ?  
    Who gave the waters and trees ?  
And winds and clouds  
    set so apace and on high ?  
And who framed, Mazda,  
    the good mind's lengthening chord ?

This Thee I ask,  
    speak forth aright, O Great Lord,  
Who is, forsooth,  
    the maker of light and shade ?  
Sleep and wakefulness  
    then, are under whom but Thee ?  
And speak forth, Thou,  
    the dawn, noon, and night who made,  
Which three their aid  
    to worshippers well afford ?

This Thee I ask,  
    speak forth aright, O Great Lord,  
Say, are all things  
    thus true as I ask of Thee ?  
Do pious deeds  
    enhance Thine own sweet concord ?  
And is Thy realm  
    in purest thoughts still inlaid ?  
O say, for whom  
    this gladly spinning earth's made ?

Through these and similar experiences of his own creation he makes himself thoroughly acquainted with the divine government of the Universe, and emboldened by these discoveries and self-revelations he gives his faithful followers authentic hopes of securing the Chosen Kingdom<sup>1</sup> (Kshathra Vairya).

Whilst this theological activity was going on in the mental world, a great cloud was gathering fast round the King and the country. The later scriptures are full of references to the state-enemies of Gushtasp, all of whom were heathen, heretics or unbelievers. The most powerful of them was Arejat Aspa or Arjasp<sup>2</sup> against whom crusades were led by the first Knights of Zoroastrianism. Even the Gathas point out a foe like Bendwa or Grehma here and there: "That fearful foe Bendwa stands always in opposition and throws me

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xliv, 4, 5, 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Yasht*, v, 109, 113—117.



into anxiety.”<sup>1</sup> But knowing as he does that his Faith is Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds, he ultimately proves that virtue alone prevails. The religion of Zoroaster was put to a final test in this great holy war, and it came out successfully. With the usual stimulus of hope, the aid of the Divine Instructor, Vohu Mano, and Asha, his battle-axe, he fought the fight and won complete victory in the end.

Before beginning this last Crusade Zoroaster's great desire is to secure a large number of Zoroastrian knights. Often he falls into a reverie and is overheard speaking to himself :

When shall men of sound wisdom enter my fold? When shall they avert the misfortune of these *drunkards*? The *Karapans* and other evil rulers of the land cause destruction only on account of lack of wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xlix, 1, 2, 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xlviii 10.

## COMING AND PASSING OF ZOROASTER 41

It is not, however, in the number of his followers, but in their good intention that the real strength lies. Truth always prevails, and at length the battle of life is won by the few but faithful Zoroastrians.

In thanksgiving the prophet sings :

O Ahura Mazda, I love Thee most, because Asha bids that truth must be chosen on account of Thy wise mind ; so that we may be able to preach Thy religion. <sup>1</sup>

And so for the remaining period of his earthly existence Zoroaster and his disciples endeavour to propagate his Faith among the people of this or that country. Many are the benefactors of the faith (*Saoshyants*) and all nature rejoices at his success. There is peace, sweet peace, in the Universe. No more is heard the wail of a sufferer or the cry of a sinner. All, all, are appeased and the entire heavens

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xlix, 6.

join in the tremendous chorus of Ahurian song :

O Ahura Mazda and O Asha, your praise is sung in songs by the stars, the sun and the dawn while they go round and round (in their paths).<sup>1</sup>

While men on earth tried their utmost to defeat or dissuade Zoroaster from his noble path, the Gathas are silent about any other supernatural powers appearing to tempt him ; but it is recorded in the Later Avesta that once Zoroaster was approached by Anghra Mainyu with a view to seduce him. "Renounce the good religion of Mazda and the whole world shall be yours," the Devil declared ; but the answer which the prophet gave to him is in total harmony with his personality as depicted in the Hymns.

Here is the heroic reply :

Never shall I forsake the true religion of Mazda, never even though my bones, my soul, my brain should fall asunder.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, I, 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Vendidad*, xix, 7.

So the Devil, too, fails.

No prophet before or after Zoroaster lived at once the life of a heaven-born saint and of a worldly man. Prophets in general either do not find time to enter into worldly affairs or have a loathing for family ties. But to the prophet of Iran was given by Ahura Mazda the fulness of life in all its aspects. To live this life completely was his object. Towards the close of his career he finds opportunities not only for converting the influential men and women of his times but also for making blood-relationships with some of them. To Jamasp one of his early converts he gives away in marriage his own daughter Pouruchista. The very last Hymn in the Book of the Gathas strikes a pleasant closing note to his great career. It is thus inscribed :

Zoroaster's sublime object was fulfilled and Ahura Mazda gave him two boons in accordance with the law of Asha, firstly that he secured a lasting

life of happiness for the future and, secondly, those who came to scoff at him remained long and grew eager to know about his religion.<sup>1</sup>

The task is here ended. The joy-bells ring and the nuptial hour of Pouruchista comes. The prophet thus recites the wedding song to the assembled masses.

To maidens fit to wed I speak forth, aye, pay heed to my nuptial song :

Be well-versed in the wise study of your Faith  
and the life of Good Mind shall be yours.

Do ye love each other in accordance with the  
Righteous Order and your home-life shall be  
happy.

Be devoted to father and husband, to workers  
and kinsmen, the holiest of the holy.

And to such Ahura Mazda shall vouchsafe the  
Best Abode for the sake of Good Mind.<sup>2</sup>

*The Passing.*—Presently the drop-scene falls. A veil of gloom, so to say, hides the beauties of the earth. In the ripeness of his fame and of his age he leaves his high office

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, liii, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, liii, 5.

after the struggle and success covering a number of years. And yet the end is happy, the wicked influences are exorcised, the noblest virtues prevail. Matters then reach a crisis, and the faint glimpses of a far-off land of divine Light and everlasting Fire are presented before his eager eyes. Slowly but solemnly he sinks to his final rest when the Sun of Ahura sets. All his staunch followers bid him a most regretful adieu. A dull evening of Khorshed Roj in the month of Dae sees Zoroaster's death ; the great struggle is over ; the deeds of duty are done. His last words to mankind, whispered slowly into the ears of his disciples, were to this effect :

This world is but an alloy true  
Of Good and Ill together sealed,  
A constant war betwixt the two  
He has ordained : 'Thou shalt not yield.'  
Man's business sole to fight the fight,  
A creature of free-will becomes  
An heir to all his deeds done right,  
The promised *Ristakhiz* when comes.

Thus unmolested do ye live,  
Let Righteousness be your sweet lot ;  
Thus unaffected do ye work,  
And leave not Virtue's field unfought.

Thus Zoroaster passed away ; but his place has been adorned by the Zarathustrotemas of later ages. He has passed away ; but his creed is the asset of mankind to-day. There is the most wonderful continuity of his faith throughout all these millenniums, the like of which has never been noticed in the history of the world. To-day his few but faithful followers keep his holy name alive and his holy Fire continually burning in the Atash-beherams in India and Persia.

Zoroaster lives although the Zoroastrian Empire is gone ; but, had there been no Zoroaster, there would have been no Zoroastrian Empire, no Darius the Great, no Noshervan the Just, and no Jamshedji Jejeebhoy. Through all these Zoroastrian heroes the spirit of the Prophet has lived. His light

is the Light of all lights and his learning has shone through all the scriptures. Zoroaster is everywhere, like his sacred rays from heaven. His Good Thought runs through every human virtue. His sound commonsense along with his metaphysical and psychological discourses have hardly ever been matched in subsequent ages. The poor peasant who finds solace in the moral wealth which he acquires from the field of *Hvarshita* (Good Actions), the rich nobleman who sets apart a portion of his earthly goods for benevolent purposes, the child that in its innocence laughs at its own danger, the aged knight who knows in his heart of hearts that evil can be crushed in the end—all owe gratitude to the Prophet Zoroaster. He must live with man as long as Truth lives in the Universe.



## CHAPTER III

### THE CREAM OF THE GATHAS

FOR the Parsees the "Book of the Gathas" is the book of all books. It is a Parsi harp on which are sounded the prevailing notes of Persian ideals. It is a common ground on which those who still believe in the Prophet can meet, their differences of opinion notwithstanding. In it his personality is revealed and pictured in what he taught and thought, what he did and directed others to do. It has modelled not only the character of the disciples and followers of Zoroaster but also the whole Persian nation with its heroes and saints. Study the book and you study the

spiritual history of Iran. Put it on the furnace of post-Zoroastrian epochs, and you will find the cream of Zoroastrianism floating on the surface. In fact, its three ringing notes are—Peace, Progress, Perfection.

We have seen how and under what circumstances Zoroaster came to this world and what the nature of his mission was. It was really to stop the current of *drujas* or lies and semi-lies in which the world then abounded. It was to warn mankind against the thoughts, words, and actions of *daevayasnians*. His aim and object being holy, all earthly storms could but fan the flame which represented his great cause. His plan was to engage, if necessary, in a kind of life-long crusade against evil-doers. Thus spake Zarathustra: "O men and women, stop publicly the path of evil, and live a life of Vohu Mano or Good Mind."<sup>1</sup> And what long wars have not ended in peace?

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, li.

Peace was then Zoroaster's goal and his was a war to stop all earthly wars. His war inevitably resulted from the culmination of the violations of Asha, the law of righteous order. And peace, he knew, would crown his struggles. Once peace steps through our doors, progress begins—the progress of humanity in all directions, social, moral, philosophical and religious. “Forward with Light” was his motto. A reformer of the first order he came to see that he left a sad and sinful world more glad, more pure, and more safe.

Lastly, perfection was sought by him as the goal. A practical prophet like Zoroaster could hardly be satisfied with the doctrine of Nirvana, or renunciation and at-one-ment. His was the doctrine of Realisation of creation's aim and end, when the soul, after struggling here below for its survival, finds at last its resting-place in its *Farohar* (guardian

Spirit), as the result of its righteous thoughts, words and deeds in this world.

*Theology.*—This leads us on to the prophet's conception of the nature of Ahura Mazda, the personal God of the Universe. An intensely individualistic tone is preserved throughout the "Book of the Gathas", and God is pictured as follows :

E'er since mine eyes are trained indeed,  
O Lord, Thee foremost I've conceived ;  
Thou'rt Father of all humankind  
And hence conceivable in mind.  
Thou first to think and first to shrine  
Thy glories into other lights ;  
Thyself creating, wise, divine  
To hold our hopes, our holy rights.  
Thou art the same eternally,  
Evolving us continually.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, He is recognised as the "Great Original," and as He is invisible He is partially known through His mighty orbs, the sun and stars. Righteousness is His right hand, and He is just not only in His

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxxi, 7, 8.

creations but also in giving rewards to the good as well as to the evil, according to their thoughts, words and deeds. He is therefore All-wise. Ahura Mazda is LIGHT, and LIGHT is Ahura Mazda.<sup>1</sup>

Ahura Mazda as conceived by Zoroaster is so far above man's understanding that He can only be realised with the aid of His archangelic and angelic virtues. His picture cannot be perfect without the supplementary colours in the heavenly rainbow. In order to acquire a complete knowledge of God and His Kingdom it is necessary for man to ascend the ladder of Perfection. It is a ladder not only to lift humanity to the goal of perfection, but it is also a bridge between *geti* (this) and *minoi* (the next world). It ultimately leads man to the House of Song and Light (Paradise). Those of us, therefore, who are patiently bearing the burden of this material

<sup>1</sup> Yasna, xxx, 5.





world with all its trials and travails, those especially who are sunk in agony and woe on account of that burden will find in Zoroaster's Ladder of Perfection true relief. His spirit moved on the higher spiritual plane of Wisdom, Rightmindedness, Righteousness, Right Authority, Bountiful Humility, Bliss and Immortality, while the world itself was on the lower plane of Arrogance, Low-mindedness, Unrighteousness, Undue Authority, Pride, Pain and Death. "Back to the Gathas" is then the only antidote to life's cares and miseries.

Next to the discovery of the Oneness of God and His Wisdom (*Mazda*), Zoroaster puts *Vohu Mano*, the step of Rightmindedness, adding to it the modern science of psychology and auto-suggestion. Good Thought is the key to mental sight and the source of good words and actions. It purifies the mind and ennobles the heart.



All depends upon what we think, but our thinking must be on the right lines, not for a mischievous purpose. One mischief which was in the world before Zoroaster was that of torture and cruelty to animals. Therefore this spirit of Vohu Mano (Behman) was said to preside over all animals. Vohu Mano also stands for great ideals. In such ideals alone lies the destiny of a great nation or individual. There is not a boon asked nor an appeal made in the Gathas, without invoking the aid of Vohu Mano.

With wisdom inborn and guided by Good Mind we are on the sure path of Righteousness (*Asha Vahishta*). Throughout the Universe this Law of Righteousness or Unity works wonderfully. It is the law which governs the mineral, vegetable, animal and human kingdoms uniformly. Whether in a beautifully shaped crystal, a splendidly tinted rose, a well-ordered community of ants or an

organised nation, the Law of Asha works with success. Asha stands for truth, eternal truth, to which God and nature constantly respond. Even Ahura Mazda cannot violate it and storms must obey it. The innumerable stars and planets and satellites revolve in perfect safety and order, only on account of this law. There is a kind of Gathic element in the following lines of Tennyson :

That God which ever lives and loves,  
One God, one law, one element,  
And one far-off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves.<sup>1</sup>

O to be a little like Ahura Mazda, like Him so truthful and so just ! O to love only the right and shun the darkness of night ! Asha Vahishta stands for Fire and Light, which are essentially part of Ahura Mazda. "Embrace the light and shun the dark" is Zoroaster's constant reminder in the Hymns. And yet how little of the Light of Ancient

<sup>1</sup> *In Memoriam*, cxxix.

Persia is retained by the modern world! "Righteousness is good, it is the best" is a spell hanging on every page of the *Avesta*, and yet how often does the modern world break this law! Therefore it is only when we shall deserve it that the Kingdom of God shall come on earth as it is in heaven to-day. It did however exist once on this earth when Zoroaster succeeded in preaching to mankind the Word of God. This Kingdom of the Chosen (*Kshathra Vairya*) shall come again if the way is properly prepared for it. This is the fourth step on the Ladder of Zoroaster and it is reached when man of his own free-will fashions his life in such a way as to make things tend heavenwards, and lives in the light of wisdom, good mind and righteousness. He who attains to this Kingdom is really wealthy, and therefore in this world of "million-tented Maya" *Kshathra Vairya* is made to preside over metals like gold and silver.

Standing at the gate of the Chosen Kingdom, our next duty is to become humble. “ ‘ Should any ask me,’ said St. Augustine, ‘ what is the first thing in religion ? ’ I would reply : ‘ the first, second and third thing therein, nay all, is humility. ’ ” The higher we ascend in the scale of life, the wider becomes our horizon of social duties, and the greater our reverence for the Creator. *Spenta Armaiti* is the fifth step on the Ladder. To befriend the poor, to speak words of comfort to the sick and to the miserable, and to utilise our powers and our position for the good of the world are the lessons we have to learn at this stage. It is our mission in life to expel all arrogance and to make the whole world a school of experience. This archangelic virtue of Humility is ingrained in the earth itself. How truly has earth, the mother, served her offspring for millions of years ! In our demands for a political Swarajya we must not forget the

claims of the lower kingdoms. Armaiti is the perfection of meekness and grace. That is why Zoroaster depicted this virtue as a female *Amshaspand*, angel, and styled her Ahura Mazda's daughter. That is why the Prophet warmly advocated agriculture and thereby made Iran the richest country in the world.

Once we attain to this Kingdom on the earth and live a life of humanity, receiving and giving all that we can, we rise into a spiritual state that is nothing short of ecstasy. The Lord Zoroaster, as we see in the Gathas, struggled earnestly for Truth, and when his heart's desire was fulfilled he was filled with seraphic rapture and ultimately revealed himself. This is the stage of *Khordar*, the sixth step, and this bliss is never denied to humanitarians. Through the lives of great Persian heroes there ran the virtues of self-sacrifice and self-denial which ultimately gained for them the sublime state

of Bliss. Before Death came the soul entered a heavenly stage, so to say, and when that messenger did actually come to take possession of the mortal body, the inner moving spirit had already found immortality.

When such an ideal condition arises, Zoroaster gives a guarantee to the world of the final dispensation and fruition of the soul. "Those who offer obedience and application of all His principles shall attain to bliss and immortality." To this Gathic verse the following is but a supplement from Dana, the American poet :

Oh, listen man !

A voice within us speaks these startling words—  
'Man, thou shouldst never die !' Celestial voices  
Hymn it into our souls : according harps  
By angel fingers touched, when the mild stars  
Of morning sang together, sound forth still  
The song of our great immortality.

There are other minor colours that go to make the pure whiteness of Ahura Mazda in the form of *yasads* or angels, whose names are

preserved by the Parsees in their ancestral calendar. Meher or celestial light and truth, Sraosha or devotion, Beheram or victory over enemies and others, all lend their help to the human soul in its ascent to Perfection. When the final stage is reached, the soul is self-satisfied and the way towards the Light is clear. There is no longer thirst or hunger or pain; and no desire is left unsatisfied. The soul is ready to meet its *kerdar*, its prototype, on the Bridge of Judgment.

*Philosophy.*—We now pass on to Zoroaster's philosophical conception in the Gathas, commonly called Dualism, the principle of *Spenta Mainyu* and *Anghra Mainyu*—Life's first two Spirits, the good and the bad, the positive and the negative, the spiritual and the material—without the reconciliation of these, life is impossible on earth. Samuel Laing is at pains in his book, *A Modern Zoroastrian*, to prove that this law of Dualism or Polarity pervades the

whole Universe. Whether it is in the purely physical domain of electricity or magnetism, in the inorganic or organic kingdom, in the worlds of lower or higher animals, or even in the spiritual regions, this law exists and forms a necessary means of evolution. Emerson calls it the law of compensation and says: "An inevitable dualism besets nature so that each thing is a half and suggests another to make it whole." The fact that the magnetic needle points north and south proves that the earth is a magnet and is subjected to polarism along with all the objects on its surface. As the connection of the two poles of an electric battery produces a current, so does the blending together of Spenta and Anghra cause life to thrive. Light and darkness, white and black, living and dead, male and female, rich and poor, and a number of other polar manifestations show that a powerful agency works throughout nature.



It is a mistake to suppose that Zoroaster's religion is dualistic, that is to say, that it inculcates belief in two real and quite contrary gods, who create good and evil objects as adversaries. Far from this post-Zoroastrian misinterpretation or interpolation, the Prophet has emphatically proved in the Gathas the presence of the All-wise and All-powerful Deity—Ahura Mazda. But it is in this doctrine of Spenta Mainyu and Anghra Mainyu that he successfully solves the anomalies of life. In his first philosophical discourse he declares :

“ I announce the two first Spirits of life, of whom the better one spoke to the worse thus : ‘ Neither our thoughts nor our teaching, nor our wisdom, nor our creed, words, actions, conscience and soul agree in any way.’ ”<sup>1</sup> A little later he adds : “ Those who do not act according to what I declare, their end shall be in misery ”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xlv, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xlv, 3.

Thus he says: "Choose between the two and form your own destiny." Constantly in the Gathas Zoroaster persuades humanity to follow the Ahurian path, the path of Asha, the path of progress, evolution and perfection. That is the choice of Spenta Mainyu. The solidarity of this life, the matter within which the spirit abides in this world, it is not possible for man to exist without. The two are sealed together by nature, as long as this earthly life lasts. It is man's sole function to move towards the spirit of Spenta Mainyu and avoid that of Anghra; for action and reaction are equal and opposite in all departments of life. For example, if laws of health are broken by any one, he is sure to fall ill. This is merely due to the law of causation, a corollary of the law of Asha.

Moreover, in this connection, Zoroaster wants us to understand that evil does not exist *by itself*; that is to say, there is no absolute

spirit called Angra Mainyu who creates evil thoughts, evil words and evil actions by himself. Likewise he cannot create any evil objects. Zoroaster would agree with Shakespeare on this point: "There is some soul of goodness in things evil," so closely is evil mixed with goodness, in matter especially. The ruin and destruction caused by fire, flood, famine and other "evils" are nothing compared with the good wrought by them on the whole. Dark spots there are in the bright luminary of the solar system, thorns are set round a beautiful rose and terrible storms follow wonderful calm. And yet it is not the spots but the photosphere, not the thorns but the rose, not the storms but the calm that prevails in the end. Nature in the struggle for existence keeps the good element always in the ascendant and hence the ultimate coming of the kingdom of Ahura Mazda is assured by virtue of the law of Asha.

Good and evil, again, are relative terms. Sir Oliver Lodge says: "Evil is not an absolute thing, but has reference to a standard of attainment. An organisation whose normal temperature is far above absolute zero is necessarily liable to deadly cold; but cold is not in itself a positive or created thing." Hence, we cannot call the positive pole of a magnet good and the negative bad. A hill appears high only if looked at from a valley. A still more satisfactory explanation of the play of opposing forces in nature can be given by the potential theory of electricity. The poles of a battery, according to this theory, are not called positive and negative, but higher and lower potentials. We can thereby conceive better the idea of attaining a higher and higher standard, or potentiality, of life. This evolving tendency ultimately results in the attainment of the goal of perfection after a gradual evolution.

We may take the term dualism in whatever sense we like, but it is true that the doctrine of Spenta Mainyu as taught by Zoroaster is unique for all time. Whereas the other Aryans thought that evil could not be overcome and so tried to appease the various gods of misfortune by sacrifices of various kinds, the Iranian prophet took mankind by a safer path and taught them how Spenta Mainyu or the Good can ultimately annihilate the other spirit. Men have but to resolve to reach the summit of Spenta Mainyu, perfection personified, and there will be no trace of evil left.

*Metaphysics.*—Here commences the metaphysical part of the Gathas upon which Zoroaster has built the whole edifice of ethics. We have proved that man after all, and in spite of all physical surroundings, limitations and hindrances, is a spiritual being; and that the Universe is not a blind but an intelligent play of creative forces. That which comes on the

surface and lives is due to the law of the survival of the fittest, or the supremacy of Spenta Mainyu over Anghra Mainyu in the end. One thing above all others which Zoroaster has mentioned definitely in this connection is the hope of this final victory, absolute and unqualified. While analysing the universal dispensations of Ahura Mazda, Zoroaster found that the world is more for the good, more with the good and held by the good on the whole, if free-will (the greatest gift of God to mankind) is properly exercised. Spenta Mainyu, with the aid of free-will, must immediately turn the balance towards the goal of perfection.

If, however, this gift is allowed to swing on the side of Anghra Mainyu, that is to say, if baser thoughts are allowed to enter the human mind, the victory is sure to be, however transitory, of evil over good. This explains the appearance of the "human devils" or

daevas in the form of men, who opposed even the prophet on the path of Asha. These heterodox enemies persecuted Zoroaster's followers indeed for a time ; but it is clearly pointed out that their evil is destroyed at last and victory is on the side of the Zoroastrians. Good, in fact, comes at last to all, and the fight for Spenta Mainyu is won in the end. There is no doubt that even without a Saviour man may save himself from sin. The first step towards the betterment of the soul is faith in the newly discovered deity, Ahura Mazda, and a daily contact with Him through prayer and worship. Whatever the inborn nature of a person may be, whatever his destiny may be, owing to the past career of the soul, it is possible for him to improve his fate, character and personality by a constant struggle in this particular life for Truth. Even repentance is possible and character may be altered, first through Spenta Mainyu and then

by the heart. As the Gathic God is personal, the destiny of man is personal too, and no outside agency or influence can alter it. Immortality granted to man in the final stage is also individual which in its turn affects the destiny of the Universe. It is therefore an individual's own efforts in this life that will give him reward and punishment in his after-life. Zoroaster is very earnest in this respect and very particular about the future existence of the soul. Once the career of a soul in this life is completed, (and it may be brief or long, for there is no time-measure in eternity), there are no anomalies in the life beyond. The judgment given by Ahura Mazda and His Court is decisive and final. True, that in this Zoroastrian doctrine of divine dispensation, the prophet is preaching a strict injunction with greater justice than mercy ; but he cannot help it; the universal laws have to be obeyed, and the entire Universe and not only



the individual has to be taken into consideration. His offers, rewards, etc. are clearly stated, there is no tactful policy adopted by him. He would not pamper evil under any circumstances; instead of forgiving it forthwith he would postpone the punishment, if necessary. To turn the course of events is in man's own hands. He can still make or mar his destiny. Instead of a wholesale forgiveness, more righteous thoughts, words and deeds are demanded of the soul; for Zoroaster, God is Light, and not Love alone. There is nothing so divinely lighted that does not deserve our best love.

Quite parallel to the conception of Spenta Mainyu and Anghra Mainyu is Zoroaster's doctrine of Heaven and Hell. In the Gathic paradise there is the idea of a "blissful state of mind," a "heritage of good thought"; while in the hell there is all mental agony. It matters little where it is exactly situated.

Zoroaster does not want man to run into unnecessary channels, he is only told that they exist in reality. Rewards and punishments in these two future existences are also from within, and not without. Ahura Mazda cannot violate His own laws. He must see that the Universe runs smoothly in accordance with all fixed laws. The stars and planets in their own ways may influence man and his destiny, as they do affect the globe of the earth, its air, lands and waters. The biggest of the planets, the earth itself, because it is nearest to him, influences him most ; so the circumstances in the world in their turn affect man's destiny. But that can only be in the world of thought. His words and his actions all depend on himself. Next to the heaven of good thoughts, or the hell of bad thoughts, is the heaven of good words and the hell of bad words, and so also for actions. These stages in the future life are necessary for the proper

evolution of the human soul. There is even a stray reference to *Hamestagan* or Purgatory in the Gathas.<sup>1</sup>

To put it in a nut-shell, Zoroaster's mentality runs along one certain line of progress towards perfection and the ultimate realisation of the Self in the abode of Light. Ahura Mazda Himself was the first to enter *Garon-mana*, (Paradise),<sup>2</sup> to which, therefore, the whole of His creation is constantly made to move. Along this path, however, two of the most heterodox classes are thrown downwards into Hell:

The Kavis and the Karapans on account of their own evil doings, whereby of their own accord they contrive to ruin mankind, find their abode at last in the home of drujas while they cross the Chinvat Peretu.<sup>3</sup>

But on the other hand the Prophet of Iran gives the surest promise to the faithful:

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxviii, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, li, 15.

<sup>3</sup> „ „ 14.

O Ahura Mazda, I shall show the way to Thy adoration to any man or woman who adopts righteousness for its own sake; I shall lead all such persons across the Bridge.<sup>1</sup>

.The Gathas also refer to the Final Ordeal by fire<sup>2</sup> of the wicked, and the ultimate dispensation of justice at the creation's end. Fire, which has been symbolised by Zoroaster as the true representative of God on earth, is also the agency whereby the world shall be renovated once again. This message of *frashokereti* is typically Zoroaster's own. The world shall be made good ultimately. The good souls shall realise their own original status in their own Fravashis in the Court of Ahura Mazda. Evil shall be extracted from the world altogether. When the world dies, the universal power of gravitation ceases to work, the descendants of Mashya and Mshyai perish; and then *ristakhez* shall happen and the sweet

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xlvi, 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, li, 9.

scent from the Best Existence shall spread far and wide. The promised *Saoshyos* shall then come and the great glory of Ahura Mazda shall abide for ever. The gigantic process of soul-purification shall slowly but silently come to a happy end !

*Ethics.*—Firmly based on these metaphysical principles with their unique theological background, there is the whole edifice of ethics. Zoroaster's ethical code is recognised by the civilised world and is popular, because it is practical and personal and at the same time transcendental. Zoroastrian morality is never apart from Zoroastrian religion. It is a mistake to think of morality as an adjunct, as merely a handmaid, of religion. It is much more than that in the opinion of Zoroaster. He places morality in the very bosom of religion. Taking away the one, you also take away the other. In the world of rationalistic ideas people are quite content if they can speak the truth and live an

honest life. There is to them no necessity for a religious fountain-head. But, in keeping morality thus apart from its sources of God-head and the Prophet's personality, no fruitful object is served. Such moralists can only bring ruin upon themselves as well as upon those whom they pretend to educate.

Zoroastrian ethics have a threefold aspect, personal, social and legal. We have seen how Zoroaster inculcates the doctrine of personality, in that all Zoroastrian prayers are personal, daily conduct rules are personal, and rewards and punishments are also personal. Here there is the first flash of the utility and value of the earthly life of man. Then, in the realm of personal morality, industry is the first and foremost ethical principle inculcated by Zoroaster. No indolent life is allowed; righteous thought is the seed of righteous word and deed. The Prophet's own career is one long righteous deed. While a busy life

is so recommended, truthfulness and justice must go with it in every detail to render it fruitful. The world of to-day is busier perhaps than in all other previous ages; but what the business or commercial world lacks to-day is sincerity of purpose. That is why the Ancient Iranians seem to have had a sort of loathing for the purely commercial aspect of life and a strong liking for the agricultural profession.

No pure action and truthful dealing can be assured without a strong desire to keep the body, mind and soul pure. Purity is therefore the next virtue strongly recommended and practised in the lives of those with whom we come in contact in the Hymns.

In the sphere of social ethics, there is the sex relationship and the consequent stability of society as a whole. Married life is powerfully reflected not only in the Prophet's personal life but also in that of his

near and dear relations. Pouruchista, who is full of wisdom, is shewn happily wedded to one whom her father knew very well to be a worthy man, although he belonged to a totally different family. The real aim of marriage seems to be the continuation of the Zoroastrian race and the propagation of the Zoroastrian Faith thereby. While there is this strong attachment to family life, society is not neglected, and benevolence is to be applied in any breach made in the community on account of the inequalities of status, family prestige, or ability. Poverty, in the Gathas, is never a sin, but a virtue which is a great incentive to heroic action, and the cradle of genius.

In legal ethics Zoroaster puts the greatest emphasis on lawful contracts whether they are by word of mouth or by solemn pledges. Lying and breach of contracts are strongly condemned. For those who are slaves to the *Druja* there is the lasting abode of



*Drujademana* awaiting. Peace can only come on earth when there is not a trace of evil left. All righteous and defensive wars are a necessity.

Obedience to those in authority, loyalty to the Ruler, and reverence for elders—all form part of Zoroastrian religion. And humility is the archangelic virtue, of which Spenta Armaiti is the incarnation as Ahura Mazda's own daughter. Public service is the very essence of Zoroaster's life. He lives and longs to see that the Soul of the World is fully appeased.<sup>1</sup> As we turn over the pages of the Book of the Gathas and approach the end, we feel that Zoroaster was satisfied with what he thought, spoke and did for mankind; that the promises he held out to his faithful followers, Kae Gushtasp, Maidhyomaongh, Haechataspa Jamāspa and others, were well-nigh fulfilled; that the passage across the Bridge of Judgment

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxviii, 1.

was clear and Paradise was in full view of his followers. Whether it was by a free and voluntary conversion to his new Faith, or by the Ordeals of Holy Fire or Molten Metal, the object of Self-realisation was ultimately attained; and towards the end of his career the Prophet was the master of his own self, his cause and his country. The joy-bells of his daughter Pouruchista's wedding day closed the full chapter of his life on this earth.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SPIRIT OF THE VENDIDAD

WE must now turn to another part of the Zoroastrian Scriptures—the Vendidad (the Law against the Evil Spirit) for the more solid food for our daily life. The Vendidad is more in use with the modern Parsees than the Gathas, and that is one reason why there is little philosophy found in the community to-day. The modern Parsee is rarely a philosopher, much less a poet or an idealist. He is more concerned with the daily worldly life than with Spenta Mainyu or with the life beyond.

The book of the Vendidad is believed to be the only complete Nask left out of the twenty-one original volumes preserved in the State

Library of Persepolis. So much has been lost, and so little left, that the modern Parsee cannot afford to lose a single line more of the Book. Rather should he wish to refer to the *spirit* of the texts whenever any social or religious question of controversy crops up, though the religion contained in the extant later *Avesta* can be said to be a mere moment in the long life of the Iranian race.

Centuries have rolled past since the age in which the *Zend-Avesta* was composed, and the times as well as the civilisations have changed to a great extent. It is therefore quite natural that the views expressed in the old-world books like the Vendidad may be found to be strange. And yet a careful study of it to-day will show many points in it quite in conformity with the modern age of science. There are also in it, questions of life and death discussed at full length and it is for the careful student to profit by its study.

The Vendidad, generally speaking, is the "Leviticus" of the Parsees, the only scripture known, except perhaps the "Pentateuch," in which "Legislation descends from the heavens to the earth in a series of conversations between the Law-giver and His God". It therefore belongs to the Datic or Legal group of the Parsee Bible, and deals entirely and precisely with things which a Zoroastrian needs in daily life—from references to the mythology of the age of the Prophet Zarathustra, King Jamshed and Doctor Thritha down to the minutest injunctions relating to domestic economy. Among the things dealt with are agriculture, state industry, hygiene and public health, also the animal world, medicine and surgery. That which affects the living world most from the purely hygienic point of view—the dead body—has also received the most careful attention of the Persian Law-giver. The mode of disposal

of the dead, strongly recommended, and the passage of the soul after death across the Chinvat Bridge are two of the pertinent points of the Zoroastrian system prominent therein.

How far can such a book as the Vendidad be a help to the modern world? How far can it also increase human health and happiness to-day? If any one, after a careful study of this time-honoured volume, written in a style and manner as old as Iran itself, should rewrite it to-day, it would make a book of four chapters at most on the four fundamental elements—fire, air, water and earth.

To talk about the worship of the four elements would be to go centuries back into the old Aryan atmosphere in which probably the ancestors of the Vendidad folk lived. The worship of the Aryan gods, Indra, Agni, Varuna, Mithra, and others was then prevalent not only in Iran but also in Aryan India, as is

evidenced by the various Vedas of the Hindus, and in Asia Minor, the home of Prophets, as was found in the Hittite inscriptions discovered during the period of the great war with Germany. To the penetrating eye of the Iranian Prophet, Zarathustra, the worship of the elements no doubt denoted a lower stage of human evolution. Of far greater understanding than any of the World-Teachers before him, he took the Aryan race to a higher plane and advocated the worship of the parent-deity, Ahura Mazda, alone, to whom there was none equal or superior. And yet Zoroaster did not discard the elements entirely. Whilst he could conceive that there was a Supreme Being to put the Universe in working order, he did not forget that it was by means of the elements that He could bring the various creatures into being. All that was good in Aryan thought he adopted and so preached that the elements were indispensable.

*The Fire.*—The element of fire, in his opinion, was the true representative of Ahura Mazda on earth. Fire was the earthly form of the Divine in the more crystallised system of Ancient Persia. According to Hindu belief Agni (fire) is a help to every soul on the way to heaven. In fact it was the proper abode of the soul, which is a spark from Brahma Himself. It is therefore also used in burning the dead, and is fed with ghee, etc, in the *Havan*. According to the Vendidad, Fire is to be restored from its misplaced condition in the world to the status of the *Daityo Gatu*, its worthy place. It is for this reason that the Fire is installed in the Parsee Fire-temple after an exceedingly elaborate and expensive ceremony. Sixteen kinds of fires are “distilled” by hundreds of operations from sixteen places where they are commonly found in human use, including the cremation ground of the Hindus. To worship Ahura Mazda a



Zoroastrian needs the medium of the Holy Fire or Light, not a man-made model of a God but the true Spirit of the living, changing world. It is for this reason also that smoking is prohibited among the Parsees, and cremation is condemned according to this spirit of the Vendidad. The argument advanced by the advocates of these fashionable innovations is that the fire is always pure, that it never becomes impure but purifies all dirt thrown into it. This is as senseless as saying that because a medical man can cure the sick he himself never falls ill; or that if we can revere the Fire in one of its aspects we should not do so in all others. But if one burns a piece of wood unintentionally, he does not sin. For such a case the rationalistic Vendidad says: "For were there sin upon such a man how soon would all the material world be only one *peshotann* (all guilty of death), so numberless

are the beings who thus sin on the face of the earth.”<sup>1</sup>

The life and purity of the fire are therefore to be preserved by the Parsee race as far as possible and a constant guardian for the purpose is the *Athravan* or priest, whose chief function is to keep it burning day and night, feeding it continually with sandalwood, in other words to preserve it.

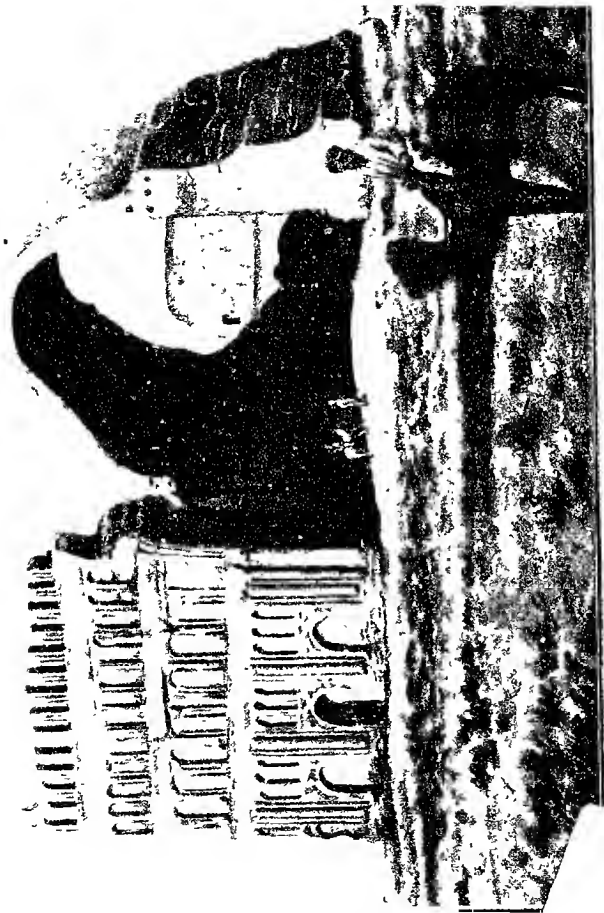
*Air*.—While the fire is perpetually fed and preserved in this manner by the Iranians, the element of air is likewise made pure. A Parsee housewife begins her day with the kindling of the hearth fire and scenting the air with perfumed smoke; and ends it with an invocation to Vayu, or *Govad Yazad*, to protect her during the night. The utility of fresh air was well known to the Ancient Persians and they believed in out-of-door work, open-air rooms and well-ventilated houses. In the *Vara* of King

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, v, 4.

Jamshed and the *Tak-e-Kesra* of Noshervan the Just, wells, towers of silence, etc., are all open to the sky. In short, pure air is to be admitted freely wherever it is necessary for human or animal life.

*Water.*—Equal care must also be taken to keep water as pure as possible for similar reasons. There are greater chances of the world being defiled through impure water than through any solid matter, for nearly two-thirds of the earth is covered with this element or unit of creation. Not only is stagnant water disallowed for ceremonies but the Goddess of waters, Ardui Sura, may not be prayed to after sunset. The rays of the sun are necessary for purifying all waters. For this reason the Parsees have built wells and bunds, but no enclosed baths where water is likely to remain stagnant and not in a flowing condition.

To keep dead matter away from the water is equally imperative. If a human or animal



TAQ-E-KESRA (Arch of Ctesiphon)



body is found in a well, the well is disused for a certain period of time, at the end of which it is entirely drained, and the *Yasna* ceremony performed by the priests, when it is ready for use again.

So strict is the law of the Vendidad in this respect that a woman whose child is still-born is not allowed to drink water, and even her food is devoid of water, consisting of dry meal, milk without water, or wine without water. She is not even allowed to take her first bath with pure water, without the use of *gomez* unmixed with water.

Like fire, water has also great purifying power. The Iranian should take a bath every day and thus keep his body clean. Before and after meals, and calls of nature, face and hands should be properly washed with water. Before performing any religious ceremony, Nan (*Snan*), a sacred bath, must be taken and, in the cases of defilement by the

touch of dead matter, the nine nights' *Barshnum* ceremony should be undergone both by priests and laymen. Even utensils should be thoroughly washed before being used for any ceremonial occasions, the degree of purity depending upon the kind of utensils used. For example, porous and earthen pots are altogether undesirable; while those made of stone should be washed six times with gomez and six times with water; and steel, brass, silver and gold vessels, four times, thrice, twice and once respectively.<sup>1</sup>

How rational the law laid down in the *Vendidad* is in this respect is seen from the following :

Zarathustra asks : " O maker of the material world, Thou Holy One ! If, however, the body (dead) be already falling to pieces and rotting (in the river), what shall the worshipper of Mazda do ?

Ahura Mazda answers : " He shall draw out of the water as much of the corpse as he can grasp with both the hands, and he shall lay it down on

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, vii, 75.

the dry ground; no sin attaches to him for any bone, hair, grease, dung, urine, or blood that may drop back into the water.”<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, it should not be understood that defiled water cannot be purified and turned to human use. In the fifth Fargard a beautiful account is given of Nature’s distillery for water which is sent down by the Almighty for various purposes on the earth, and which is defiled in the *Dokhma* and other places where dead matter remains during the monsoon. Says Ahura Mazda :

I make them (impure waters) flow back unseen ; I make them flow back to the sea Puitika. The waters stand there boiling, boiling up in the heart of the sea Puitika, and when cleansed there, they run back again from the sea Puitika to the sea Vourukasha, towards the well-known tree (the tree of all seeds).<sup>2</sup>

*Earth.*—But as we pass on to the solid sphere of the earth, the Vendidad becomes stricter still in its emphasis on purity. “ Which land is

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, vi, 28, 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, v, 18, 19.



the most appeased, O Ahura Mazda?" is the chorus of a splendid earth-song sung by Zoroaster in the third Fargard. The answer is:

O Zarathustra, that land is the most appeased in which man sows seeds of corn and makes it fertile and green, on which there are flocks and herds of animals living, which the faithful reclaim from the sea or the hill, and build dwelling-places for the faithful who are made to thrive thereon.

In fact the earth is made to feel the joys and sorrows of the beings she bears on her bosom—an echo as if from the Bose Research Institute in Bengal. Spenta Armaiti, the presiding deity of the Earth, is symbolised as the daughter of Ahura Mazda and an emblem of Humility.<sup>1</sup>

King Jamshed is said to have extended the earth to one-third, then two-thirds, and lastly three-thirds of its original size. Herds of cattle and flocks and men then came to live upon it in a number satisfying his wishes; and when the bitter winter came again he

<sup>1</sup> L, *Humus*, the ground,

preserved the best of all animate and inanimate objects and saved the whole from a great catastrophe. Thus Jamshed became a better king than a priest.

Agriculture, in the Vendidad, is the best of all professions. In fact it was *the* practical side of the Zoroastrian system for a long time. "He who sows corn, sows righteousness," is the spirit of this section of the Vendidad—so much so that "if a land is uncultivated, it is as much a matter for disappointment as a beautiful maiden left barren in this world". There is another reason why the Vendidad is so very keen on the art of tillage. It combines industry with physical culture. Work, physical exercise and fruit-gathering are the items of a noble programme for humanity in the Vendidad. It was the age of great heroes and heroic actions which required strength of body. This reminds us of the bold statement of Swami Vivekananda :

Be strong, my young friends ; that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita. These are bold words, but I have to say them, for I love you. I know where the shoe pinches. I have gained a little experience. You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. You will understand the Upanishads better and the glory of the Atman, when your body stands firm upon your feet and you feel yourselves as men.

More than this Indian saint, the Persian prophet has been a utilitarian in the department of physical training and has advocated agriculture, which means work and worship. " Hold ready, O Mazdayasnian Zoroastrians, your feet, hands and intelligence for the well-doing of good deeds, according to the law and at the right time,"<sup>1</sup> is another pillar passage in the book of *Visparad*. Thus and thus alone can a person keep body and soul together.

While the cultivation of the ground is so much encouraged by Ancient Persia, there is

<sup>1</sup> *Visparad*, ch. 15.

strict prohibition of burying any dead animal matter in the ground. The spirit of the Vendidad is more for the good of the living than for the dead. Dead animal matter left decaying for a time in the ground is highly injurious to public health. A piece of ground in which a corpse is buried can only be reclaimed after some fifty years, at the end of which period only the last traces of *nasu* are gone.<sup>1</sup> It is even stated that it will be a meritorious act if a dead body buried in the ground is dug out and exposed to the sun.

There are impurities emanating from matter which is either partially or wholly dead. To the former class belong *hener*, e.g., hair, nails, layers of skin etc., from living beings; while complete death means loss of life, fire or spirit within the body. All impurities in the latter case arise from an attack of the *Druj Nasu* (the demon of death) on them.

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, vii, 48.

the times in which the book was composed, we can say with confidence that there are many good and useful lessons which the modern world can still learn from it. That mankind should first of all preserve purity in all its aspects, that personal weal is the common wealth of a nation, that purity may be restored to impure things in nature, that kindness to animals and lower beings is an essential part of human civilisation and, last but not least, that there is dignity in labour—these form indeed an excellent moral and social code for any nation and for any age.

To Zoroastrians therefore the spirit of the Vendidad is the spirit of all ages, especially that of the modern age of science. To live the life of the Vendidad is to live well and with propriety.

## CHAPTER V

### MODERN SCIENCE IN ANCIENT PERSIA

THE extant Parsee scriptures are the remains of a mighty literature which humanised the Persian nation for thousands of years. They can be compared to geological strata, formed in many ages and by many agencies, but eroded by time and scarred by the processes through which they have passed.

According to Persian tradition, at first there existed twenty-two volumes. The Pahlavi book, the *Dinkard*, which gives a summary account of them all, records that there were two copies of this Avestan Encyclopædia prepared by Vishtasp, one of which

was placed in the royal treasury called Ganj-e-Shapigan, and the other in Dez-e-Napisht, the Fortress of Documents. Pliny, the historian, tells of two million verses of Zoroaster, while the Arab writer, Tabari, talks of twelve thousand hides of inscribed writings of the Prophet. And Hermippus, in the third century B.C., affirms that "the founder of the doctrines of the Magis was also the author of twenty books, each containing one hundred thousand verses".

We have already reviewed two of the most important Avestan works which are still with us. The *Yasna*, which contains the Gathic Hymns, is the chief liturgical book. These hymns are recited in honour of the *amesha-spentas* (archangels) and *yazatas* (angels); the *Yashts* which cover the major part of the later Avesta are glorification hymns dedicated to the divinities. Although the step from the older Avesta to the more modern Avesta is a

step into a different world of theology and practical life, even Zoroaster being deified in the latter; and although the Persian mind is ever struggling for Eternal Bliss; it cannot be supposed that classic Persia neglected altogether the affairs of nature and of the living, changing world. Indeed practical Persia raised her structure of philosophy and spirituality on the firm rock of nature and her laws.

For centuries religion has remained averse to science in this world. In Europe, science promised too much and achieved but too little. Realism led to individualism and ultimately to anarchism. In their enthusiasm to conduct lightning and raise lofty spires, in their zeal to find the philosopher's stone and analyse the starry heights, unconsciously religion was overlooked; and the validity of the statements made in the ancient scriptures was questioned. There appeared to be no mission assigned to



human souls. But the religious teachings that prevailed in Persia only survived so long because they could stand the test of scientific research. It is therefore necessary that the modern world should know how far religion helped science and *vice versa* in the past.

An attempt has been made in the present chapter to show, mostly from Avestan sources, and taking the term "science" in the broadest possible sense;—

(1) how the religion of Ancient Persia is based on certain scientific principles;

(2) how certain ideas, customs and usages of Iran are true to-day;

(3) how many of the modern sciences and arts and crafts were known to, and practised by, the Ancient Persians.

In fact, we attempt to show the two objects of science they kept in view, namely, to make human life healthy and to satisfy human longings for the supernatural. Even the earliest

Persian kings are credited with discoveries and inventions.

Haoshangha, the first king of primitive Iran, is credited with the discovery of fire. He was the first man to bring iron into use and to make implements of various kinds. He is further credited with the construction of canals and irrigation works. The art of weaving is said to have been introduced by his successor, Takhma Urupi. Gold and silver, rubies and precious stones, were dug out from the earth in the auspicious reign of Yima and were used for making ornaments. The great king's throne, studded with precious stones, became the wonder of the world. Wine was made for the first time in his reign. It was Yima who first made ships to cross the sea. He was likewise the first to construct roads. He is hailed as the greatest discoverer of his age. Sugar-cane was discovered by the king and sugar was thenceforth made from its juice. The discovery of the art of medicine, ascribed by the Avestan works to Thritha, is credited by some writers to this king.<sup>1</sup>

We shall now deal with the different branches of science, one by one.

*Heat, Light and Sound.*—In the science of physics, energy is the general term applied

<sup>1</sup> Dhalla's *Zoroastrian Civilisation*, pp. 8, 9.

to heat, light, electricity and magnetism. Generally speaking, all these forms of energy ultimately turn into heat. If we rub two pieces of wood, stone or metal together, heat will be the resulting energy. Light and electricity give out heat. Even sound waves can be made to produce heat energy. Heat in fact is life itself. It is therefore clear why fire was greatly honoured and even worshipped by the Iranians. But it was not fire-worship as in the case of the early Aryans; it was the worship of the very Spirit of the Universe. "Fire" conveys in the best possible manner the notion of the conservation of energy, or the Living Element, signified by the name "Ahura Mazda" (Rt. *Ah*, to be). Fire is the pure and constant representative of the Avestan deity, Ahura Mazda, in this material world. It is, according to the *Atash Nyaish*, the *puthra*, (Sk. *putra*, son) of the Almighty Father, Ahura Mazda. Again in the Gathas we read:

By means of Thy blazing Fire, O Ahura Mazda, (he) devotes himself to the holy battle of life.<sup>1</sup>

And in the Haptan Yasht:

• Happy is the man to whom Thou comest, O Fire! Thou art acquainted with Ahura Mazda, with the heavenly, O Fire! We draw near to Thee with Good Mind, with the words and deeds of Good Wisdom. Through Thy Fire, we approach Thee, and Thee alone, O Lord!<sup>2</sup>

Thus we see how the physical fire leads us to the spiritual Fire within us. Fire, according to the *Atash Nyaish*, grants to worthy devotees health, strength, long life, ready speech, wakefulness, and intelligence; it blesses with plenty and prosperity in life the pious worshipper, who brings to it in return dry and fragrant wood. Now we know that our earthly fire is but the offspring of the parent sun; the nebular hypothesis and spectrum analysis have confirmed this. The energy of

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xxxi, 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxvi, 1, 4.

the sun's rays are, so to say, stored up in the fuel which we burn, the food that we eat, and in our bodies that are built by it. Hence the keen scientific insight of the writer of the Fire Hymns is proven. Healthy and prolonged life is also promised by the use of the electricity of Michael Faraday to-day.

In the *Yasna*, five kinds of fires are mentioned, and are commented upon in the Pahlavi *Bundahishn*. (1) *Atar Berezisanvang*, the splendour which is in the presence of God and kings, (2) *Atar Vohufryana*, the fire or warmth in the bodies of men and animals, (3) *Atar Urvazishta*, heat in plants and vegetation, (4) *Atar Vazishta*, the electricity in clouds and lightning or the thunderbolt, and (5) *Atar Spenishta*, the household fire causing the greatest happiness; these, then, are the various forms in which fire-energy is stored up in the Universe.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Cama Memorial Volume* (Bombay, 1906), I p. 261, 262.

This great appreciation of fire was perhaps also due to the climatic conditions and physical features of Ancient Iran. The frequent volcanic eruptions in those days, the hot springs active even to-day, the intense summer-heat of the sandy desert, and the equally cold winter—all go to show the great utility and awe-inspiring nature of fire, as the chief strength-giving element. Life is granted by Ahura Mazda to enjoy “the heat of His bounty” and to kindle the sacred Fire in the human heart.

With Fire there is also the worship of the Sun (Khorshed, Av. Hvare-khshaeta) and his companion Mithra (Per-Mehr). Both these angels are praised together. As a rule, the one depends upon the other in the production of light and heat. The sun’s rays are carried through the ether of space (Mithra). “When the sun shines” says the author of the *Khorshed Nyaish*, “hundreds of thousands of spiritual beings stand up and spread the light

throughout space. But when it does not shine, all the noxious *daevas* (vile creatures) kill all living objects." Science has shown how in the absence of the sun, during dark hours and in dark places, noxious germs and diseases prevail on the earth. The sun is also called in the Avesta, *amesha* or immortal, showing that all else will die, but the sun will survive its planets, the creatures living on them, and their satellites.

Similarly, Meher or Mithra is said to be "of wide pasture, of a thousand ears and ten thousand eyes". Mithra is also one that is "inside the land," "neighbouring the land," "above the land," "suspended over the land," "surrounding the land," "behind the land".<sup>1</sup> If Mithra helps the diffusion and production of light rays, it cannot but be the *ether* of space.

The science of Optics has shewn us that light consists in the emission of very small

<sup>1</sup> *Meher Nyaish*, § 11.

particles, called corpuscles, from the burning body. The later and more satisfactory theory of "Undulation" proves that light is transmitted through ether by means of waves produced in it by the sun's radiant energy. It is to the latter that Mithra would largely contribute, representing as it does the medium ether, while the Sun, Khorshed, helps him to be the body-burning agent.

The world of matter is then closely related to the world of ether, and it is very likely that they both in turn are akin to the world of spirit (*minoi*). The constant reference to the minoi and the geti worlds, together with Zoroaster's discovery of the immortality of the soul, shows that they must be so. Heat is life and life itself is heat. "Heat expands and cold contracts" is a general principle. Professor Havenden of England says: "Life is due to the expansion and contraction of the elastic electrons which constitute the



Universal Ether.”<sup>1</sup> And Sir J. C. Bose of Bengal has proved that *all matter is living*. The theory of sound waves in physical science shows that certain vibrations are produced in the air whenever certain words are properly and correctly pronounced. These vibrations, again, produce certain definite geometrical forms and also colours. They have their effects on all surrounding bodies, whether animate or inanimate, material or spiritual. When they are recited for the betterment of the object acted upon, the art is white; and, when the aim is injurious or the reciter selfish, the art is black.

The most powerful healer of all is the *Manthra Spenta* healer, mentioned in the *Ardibahesht Yasht*. That is to say, by reciting certain holy verses, in their proper form and accents, for those who suffer any physical or mental pain a powerful effect is produced on

<sup>1</sup> “Bibby’s Annual,” 1915, p. 111.

them. The Evil Spirit is depicted in the Yasht as a sufferer himself who repentantly cries :

. Woe to my fate ! Asha Vahishta shall destroy the worst of sicknesses, shall destroy the worst of plagues. . . .<sup>1</sup>

There is an abundance of such spells, referred to as *Tisame-Zarthost* in the later Iranian literature, of which we shall speak in the section on Magic.

*Polarity.*—The most important doctrine of Zarathustra, propounded in the *Yasna* (chapters xxx and xlv), is that of Spenta Mainyu and Anghra Mainyu, of Good and Evil, popularly so called, and regarded as dualism, wrongly interpreted. The earth itself is a huge magnet, everything shows its polar tendencies, and in the human world of attractions and repulsions the law is most strongly manifest. But for these dual manifestations

<sup>1</sup> *Ardibahesht Yasht*, § 14.

the innumerable combinations in the Universe would not have existed.

It must be first of all understood that pure Gathic Zoroastrianism is *not* dualistic. In the Gathas, over and above these First Principles of life, there is the Spirit of Ahura Mazda and He alone is invoked and admired as the Highest. Both the principles are essential in a way, but Ahura Mazda has *not* created Evil. It is man's free-will that turns the right path into a wrong one and man is therefore forever punished.

We shall here refer to the Potential Theory of Electricity. Life is ever swinging between the two poles, the one, Spenta, rising to higher and higher levels, and the other, Anghra, diving deeper and deeper into the low thought-regions of what is popularly termed "Hell". *Spenta* means "promoting," "evolving". In giving a promise "to hate the evil and enhance the good," we take life in the

positive or higher, evolving, potential sense, and shun the degrading evil.

*Chemical Knowledge.*—No regular description of any chemical process is found in the *Avesta* proper; but applying the principles of philology, one can find many resemblances between the lines of culture on which the ancient Persians and Indians worked. Both prepared drugs from medicinal plants, and both used metals like iron, copper, silver and gold. In his splendid work, *A History of Hindu Chemistry*, Dr. P. C. Ray rightly says :

In tracing the progress of chemical knowledge among the civilised nations of old, one always finds it ultimately associated with medicinal preparations, metallurgical operations, the technical arts, and belief in the transmutation of metals.<sup>1</sup>

How medical drugs were prepared by the Ancient Persians is not known to us, but it is certain that they were prepared and used by them. Swords, arrows and other steel

<sup>1</sup> page. 1.

weapons were common, and gold and silver ornaments were worn by the women of Iran. In the eighth chapter of the *Vendidad*, potters, glaziers, goldsmiths, silversmiths, blacksmiths and bakers are those mentioned from whom fire was taken and purified by a special process.

From metals and herbs the Iranians made a few alloys, also colours and scents. The richness of the dress and the fragrance of scented articles made for the goddess, Ardui Sura, are well-known. The shellac-like varnish (as fresh to-day as ever) on the cuneiform inscriptions of the Behistun rock, and the rich paintings on Persian pottery and on the walls of Persepolis and Ctesiphon are other examples of Iran's skill. It is said that the Arabs introduced alchemy, which has developed into modern chemistry. In their efforts to find the "philosopher's stone," they indirectly laid the foundation of the science of

chemistry; and, if we believe that Iran influenced Arabia, much of the Iranian science of chemistry can be found in extant Arabic literature.

*Medicine and Surgery.*—On the subject of medicine our chief authority is the *Vendidad*, in which much attention is given to bodily purity, to the cure of diseases and to the efficacy of “manthras” or charms. The first doctor of medicine, Thritha, of the Sama family, is twice mentioned in the *Avesta*. In *Yasna* ix, he appears as one of the priests of Homa, the Eternal Giver of immortal life; and in the *Vendidad* he is mentioned as the first Peshedadyan healer. Says Ahura Mazda:

Thritha it was, who was first of the healers, of the wise, the happy, the wealthy, the glorious, the strong, the Paradhata; he drove back sickness, drove back death to death, and first turned away the point of the sword and fire of fever from the bodies of mortals.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, xx, 2, 3.

He obtained the remedies from "Kshathra-vairya" and cured fevers, colds, headache, evil eye, decay and infection. As a reward for prayers Ahura Mazda granted him ten thousand healing plants, of which the king was the Homa (*Homa Zairi*).<sup>1</sup>

Tradition also says that Faridun had the distinction of discovering the "medical power". So much was he revered that the amulets worn to-day by the natives of Persia, called *taviz*, bear the name "Faridun". According to the *Ardibahest Yasht*<sup>2</sup> and also the *Vendidad*<sup>3</sup> the best of all healers is the Manthra Spenta. The others are herbs (medicine), and the knife (surgery). In fact Thritha drew his powers of surgery from the Archangel presiding over metals, Sheher-evar. As regards "spells" the following is

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, x, 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ardibahest Yasht*, §6.

<sup>3</sup> *Vendidad*, vii, 44.

very characteristic of the *Vendidad*: "To thee, O sickness, I say, avaunt!"<sup>1</sup>

The seventh chapter of the *Vendidad* also deals with the functions of doctors and surgeons. The Iranian doctor was trained on a regular system. He was to give three trials to a "devilish" person (*darvand*) and "if he treat a worshipper of the daevas with the knife for the third time and he die, he is unfit for ever and ever".<sup>2</sup> Three more successful trials on a Mazda-worshipper and he passed the examination of surgery. The following are some of his other qualifications:

A physician is one who knows the limbs of the body and their articulations (physiology), remedies of diseases (*materia medica*), who is skilled in preparing health-giving drugs medically (chemistry), and expelling corruption and impurity; who also possesses his own carriage and an assistant (compounder), and is moreover gentle in words, a friend of the sick (a nurse), respecting modesty (moral), of a good reputation (successful), and above

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, xx, 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, 37, 38.



all ready to further peace and multiply the delights of life.

Among the diseases known to and cured by the ancient Persians were itches, tumours and even plague. King Faridun, according to the *Farvardin Yasht*, could cure them, and Jamasp Hakim is said to have predicted to King Gushtasp :

Great plagues will occur three times, one in the wicked reign of Dahak, one in that of Frasyav of Tus, and one in the last millennium of Zoroaster. Heavy rains and black and red hail-stones will fall three times. Famine will occur likewise three times. There will be three great wars.<sup>1</sup>

There is a good deal about midwifery and the treatment of the woman with a still-born child, in the fifth chapter of the *Vendidad*. Zoroaster questions Ahura Mazda : " If in the house of a worshipper of Mazda, there be a woman with a still-born child, what shall the worshipper of Mazda do ? " <sup>2</sup> The first thing he

<sup>1</sup> *Cama Memorial*, Vol. (Bombay, 1900), pp. 233, 234.

<sup>2</sup> *Vendidad*, v, 51.

is told is to prepare the *cleanest* and *driest* place in the house for her. The food to be given is boiled milk or cooked milk without water.<sup>1</sup>

• *Analysis of Gaomez*.—It is prepared chiefly from the urine of a pure white and holy bull, *Varasi*, with an elaborate ceremonial called the Nirangdin. We have just referred to the use of gaomez referred to in the *Vendidad*. If there is anything that puzzles Parsee thinkers to-day in regard to their *sacred* ceremonials, it is the use of this gaomez (bull's urine), which is in the eyes of other people a most impure substance. How can the use of it be reconciled with the extremely pure and scientific religion that Zoroaster founded in Iran?

It was at first believed that this preserved urine contained carbolic acid. Dr. Wilhelm of Germany in a small booklet showed some years ago that this was not the case. Recently,

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, v, 52.

a member of the Bombay Agricultural Department analysed a sample of preserved urine and he submitted the results as follows :

A sample of urine preserved in 1894 appeared reddish in colour and dark, with a not unpleasant smell, part of which was due to ammonia. The sample had the *appearance* of carbolic acid in it, which was only suspected but not confirmed, and the repeated tests for ordinary antiseptics also failed. A little was then evaporated and some residue was left, the percentage being 11·08, which was due to common salt (NaCl). On the other hand the urine was found to be much more alkaline than fresh urine, for while the latter contained alkalinity equal to 1·12 % of  $\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3$ , that which had been long preserved contained 17·5 % of the same. The urea or urea-like compounds were only found to be in traces, most of them being decomposed into ammonia and a salt of carbonic acid. The urine was then preserved at a higher temperature (34° to 38° C.) for about a week. No change or fermentation, however, took place in it, but it turned much darker in colour. On being sown with mould organisms for some days, they did not grow in it owing to alkalinity. It was only when the stuff was acidified that mould began to grow.

These results show that gaomez cannot be an antiseptic as it was hitherto supposed to

be. But the most remarkable point about it is that its alkaline character makes a good preservative of it, and the urine does not decay for many years. If applied to the skin outwardly, this preserved bull's urine is not harmful; and taken internally, on account of the alkali, it may only cool the system and, being devoid of any bacteria, may be harmless there also. As regards the mysterious spiritual efficacy of the gaomez, it is difficult to pronounce any judgment at present. This use of bull's urine at the time of Nân and Barshnum may be a means of penitence, like the cow-urine and cow-dung used by the brahmanas for such a purpose.

*Laws of Hygiene.*—If the *Vendidad* is to be valued for anything to-day, it is for its more or less perfect hygienic code, and the laws of sanitation that were propounded in the Aryan world, ages before the modern germ-theory was advanced in Europe. It is indeed

remarkable that laws of sanitation, like the River Pollution Act of England and the Quarantine Regulations of India during an epidemic, were framed and even practised by the people of Iran, when the chief countries of the modern world were just passing through their primitive phases. Ancient Iran in the East, then, took the initiative and taught the world how to live a clean and healthy life.

Ventilation and wind-doors were constructed by King Jamshed of old for his "Vara," at the time of Noah's Ark; and the cupolas of the Taq-i-Kesra (Ctesiphon) contain holes to serve as windows. In the *astodāns* (bone-receptacles) there was always a hole for admitting light and air.<sup>1</sup>

The seventh chapter of the *Vendidad* deals with the preservation of pure river and well waters. No dead bodies were to be thrown into running waters lest poisonous

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, ii, 30.

germs<sup>1</sup> should develop and multiply themselves. The Zoroastrians never bury their dead for the same reason. The ground in which dead bodies are buried is the most unhappy.

The Barshnum ceremony is also a process of purification of the impure human body. He who, for example, touches a dead body in its decaying condition must get himself thus disinfected. But it may be noted in this connection that the way in which Barshnum is at present practised by our *Mobeds* can hardly be called hygienic and healthy. The true spirit of the *Avesta* seems to have been discarded, and with it many a precept of Zoroaster, meant to promote happiness and long life.

Again, the *Druj Nasu* (decomposition) attacks a body as soon as the soul leaves it, and the *Vendidad* is strict in enforcing the law that no man can carry a dead body singly.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, vii, 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 14.

Things pervious to water such as wood, cotton, etc., must not be allowed to touch a dead body. Only iron coffins are therefore recommended, and fire is to be kept burning, with incense, in the house in which a dead body lies for any time. In Zoroastrian ceremonies no earthen pots are used, and even the polished utensils are washed several times before they are fit for use.

The sun's rays are valued most for purification, and Ardui Sura, the goddess of waters, cannot be worshipped *after* sunset. Wells for drinking-water and Towers of Silence for dead bodies are to be constructed in such a manner as to allow the full play of the solar heat on them.

The following is, in a way, the health code of the Parsees :

Thou shalt not speak aloud while eating.

Thou shalt not leave thy hands and feet unwashed before and after meals.

Thou shalt not leave thy hands and feet unwashed after a call of nature.

Thou shalt not eat from another's mouth or . drink from another's cup any food or drink.

Thou shalt not move about bare-headed and bare-footed.

Thou shalt not pollute river or well-water or even the earth with any organic matter, dead or decaying.

Thou shalt not touch a dead body under any circumstances.

Thou shalt not fail to burn incense and keep thy fire burning in thy house night and day.

Thou shalt not escape the Barshnum (quarantine for nine nights) in cases of pollution, contamination, etc.

Thou shalt not put on garments of any colour but white on ceremonial occasions.

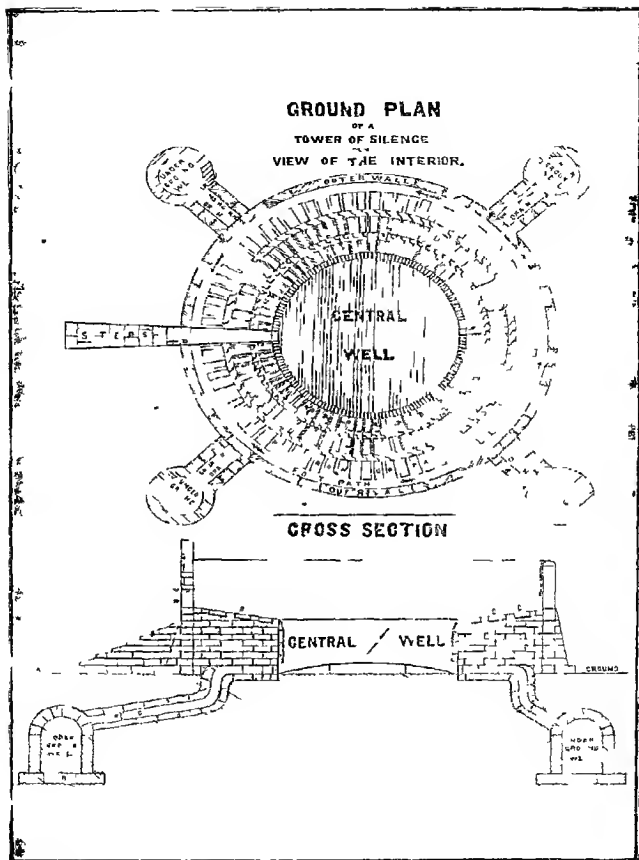
It is mainly for principles of health that the Parsees, unlike other Eastern or Western



peoples, have been taught to abstain from smoking.

*The Hygiene of the Dokhma.*—The construction of the *Dokhma*, the Tower of Silence, is based on sound hygienic principles. The dead bodies are exposed therein to the powerful tropical sun, and also to birds which dispose of them in a few minutes. The corpses are “clothed with the light of heaven and are kept beholding the sun”.<sup>1</sup> The action is quick, hygienic, uninjurious to any living thing or person. The Tower is generally built on a hill-top and away from human habitations. The circular platform measures about 300 ft. in circumference, and there are three rows of receptacles; for males, females, and children. There are footpaths for corpse-bearers. The central well is about 150 ft. in diameter, into which bones are thrown at intervals, after they are dried up by the atmospheric

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, vii, 46.





agencies, and ultimately they are reduced to dust.

There are four drains in the inner side of the well, through which rain-water passes into four underground wells at a distance from the central tower on four sides. At the end of each drain, filters made of sand and charcoal are put and renewed occasionally. Any water that washes down the tower, from the sides and the well containing dry bones, can enter the earth's interior only after it has passed through the filters.<sup>1</sup>

It has been remarked that, if any matter or bones belonging to the corpses exposed in the Tower is carried away and thrown out by birds, none is to be blamed according to the *Vendidad*. It is desirable that dwelling-places should not be built near it, in order to avoid infection of any kind; and the corpses are to be fastened. This manner of disposing

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, vi, 47, 48.

of the dead—flesh-distillation by birds,—was recommended as the best in those days.

With the electrical facilities of our own day it has been urged by many that, if Zoroaster were to revise his rules to-day, he would certainly recommend the more up-to-date method. A crematorium, though quite out of the question in ancient Iran, is in their opinion the most suitable way of disposing of the dead body. This view to the orthodox is un-Zoroastrian as it involves the use of the “sacred Fire” for the burning of dead matter; for the Dokhma system is based on the preservation of the purity of the four elements, fire, air, water and earth. To defile them would be to violate the very principles of the *Vendidad*.

*Geology and Astronomy.*—It was in the pleistocene period of geological formations that the glacial epoch took place, and the earth was then covered with snow and ice. In the second *Vendidad* a very old but interesting account

is given of this great winter. "Large masses of glacial ice went creeping downwards from high mountains to the valleys of the Ardui Sura."<sup>1</sup> The old theory of Noah's Ark, or Jamshed's Vara, is now exploded, and its place is taken by the "glacial drift" theory.

Unlike other ancient nations the Avestan people believed in "a gay, round, rotating earth". "*Ranyoskeretim gâm*" are the words in the Gathas.<sup>2</sup> Stars and planets moved in the sky, and the phases of the moon were noted.

While a day was conveniently divided into five *gehs* or periods in the later *Avesta*, only three such divisions are pointed out in the Gathas, showing that the probable home of the Persian Aryans was near the arctic region, as Mr. Tilak showed in the case of the Hindus of the Vedic period. In the

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, ii, 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Yasna*, i, 2.

*Vendidad*, winter is described in its most terrible aspect, showing either that the frigid zone of the earth has been slowly shifting upwards, or that the Avestan people lived in colder regions when the *Avesta* was composed.

The Iranians carefully marked the winter solstice on the 21st March and even to-day the Persians observe it as the holiday called *Famshed-i-Naoroz*.

Some of the most prominent heavenly bodies and constellations are referred to in the *Zend-Avesta*. Tishtrya (Sirius) is the Sirdar of the east; Satavaesa (Antares in Scorpio) is that of the west; Vanant (Fomalhaut) of the south and Haptoiring (Ursa Major) of the north. In the *Bundahishn*, Beheram is considered to be the same as Mars, while Anahita (xx) is the same as Venus. In the *Beheram Yasht* the angel is imagined as one appearing in ten different animal forms, which

some scholars consider to be ten different constellations.

The twelve asterisms<sup>1</sup> according to the *Dinkard* and the *Bundahishn* are: Aspini, Yevina, Parviz, Paha, Azesar Beshn, Rashnut, Taraha, Azara, Vaz, Maian, and Avden. Dravaspa in the *Gosh Yasht* is the Milky Way. It is "one having many spies (eyes), having light of her own, having a far way and a long constellation".<sup>2</sup> Haptoiring<sup>3</sup> controls according to the *Tir Yasht* 99,999 demons. Taera, the Greenwich of the *Avesta*, is the highest point of Mount Haraberezaiti (Elburz)—18,000 feet.

In the realm of physiography, too, the Iranians show no ignorance of the laws of nature. In the *Tishtar Yasht*<sup>4</sup> we have a

<sup>1</sup> *Cama Memorial*, Vol. (Bombay 1900), pp. 216—224.

<sup>2</sup> *Gosh Yasht*, § 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Farvardin Yasht*, § 60. *Tir Yasht*, § 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Tir Yasht*, §§ 31-33.



splendid account of the formation of rain by Tishtrya, first by taking steam and vapours from the sea Vourukasha (Caspian) where water is "boiled"; then aided by Satavaesa the vapours are raised over the mountain Us-Hindava (Hindu Kush?) which is in the middle of the sea Vourukasha. The clouds are distributed by the agency of Maego-kara (cloud-carrier) and then prosper all lands with rain and hail. Now Us-Hindava is said to be in the middle of the sea Vourukasha. If Dr. Haug is right in saying that it is the same as Hindu Kasha or Kusha, we may consider the theory of the existence of a sea in old Kashmir, where the fossils indicate that it must have once been a sea-bottom. Vourukasha itself then can no longer be thought of as the present Caspian Sea, but as a vast ocean reaching as far as the Indus river in Sind.

Astrology is closely connected with astronomy. The Ancient Persians are said to have

excelled in the former, and a monumental work called *Famaspi*, containing a forecast of some five thousand years, by the famous Prime Minister of King Gushtasp, existed in the State library of Persia. Places are pointed out in Persia where astronomical observatories must have stood in the past, for example, at Zij, near Urumia in Azarbaijan.

The Ancient Persians seem to have had a clear idea of the Solar year, and they framed their calendar also on the annual revolutionary period of the earth. In the *Dinkard* we find the following :

‘Hours intercalating (in the day-form) from (several) years’ is that (solar year) which (is so called) owing to the six hours, (made up) of fractions of hours, which accumulate from year to year at the end of 365 days. By deferring (their addition) they (the hours) may amount to one day in four years; ten days in forty years, (at the rate of) a quarter of a day per year; one month in 120 years; five months in 600 years; one year in 1,440 years.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Cama Memorial* Vol., p. 15.

How the modern Parsees came by their present faulty calendar is another story altogether.

*Agriculture.*—The first test of culture for a civilised nation is its pursuit of agriculture. The Persian soil was not very suitable for this, some parts being very hilly while others were very sandy; and yet the fact that the Iranians were agriculturalists of the first order shows how diligent the whole nation must have been. Cultivation was to them only next to righteousness. In fact, instead of preaching asceticism, they encouraged honest labour. Throughout the *Avesta* there are references to righteous actions, and the cultivation of fields and farms was the most sacred profession at that time. "The third place," says the *Vendidad*, "where the earth feels most happy is where one of the faithful sows corn, grass and fruit, O Spitama Zarathustra, where he waters the ground that

is dry or drains the ground that is too wet.”<sup>1</sup> Again, “He who does not till me (the earth) with the left arm and the right, and with the right arm and the left, ever shall stand at the door of the stranger, among those who beg for bread.”<sup>2</sup> So much of a farmer’s life was occupied in this holy action that the following religious song is put in his mouth :

At the sight of the barley the demons sweat,  
 At the sight of the fan the demons cough,  
 At the sight of the millstone the demons greet,  
 At the sight of the doughcake the demons are  
     off.  
 The demons he sends in haste away,  
 From the house of the doughcake scared they  
     fly,  
 They scorch their jaws, they cannot stay  
 Where the barley store heaps multiply.<sup>3</sup>

On account of the scarcity of rain in some parts of Iran, irrigation was freely practised. There were three stages of farming known to

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, iii, 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Moulton’s *Early Religious Poetry of Persia* (1911, Cambridge), p. 20.

the people—watering or irrigation of the soil, ploughing up or digging and furrowing, and ploughing down or covering up the earth again after sowing the seeds.<sup>1</sup> Tanks, artificial viaducts, canals and wells were also constructed.

By the cultivation of the ground, the construction of fountains and the planting of trees, the rigour of the Iranian soil and climate were gradually and imperceptibly mitigated.<sup>1</sup>

The famous “persian wheel” is a valuable inheritance from the good Iranian agriculturists.

*Vegetable and Animal Kingdoms.*—The Homa plant was considered to be the parent plant. It is described to be one “expelling death” in the *Homa Yasht*, and so, after an expensive ceremony, its juice was drunk as a vegetable tonic by the Iranians, as well as by the Indian Aryans, in order to secure

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, vi, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Geiger: *Civilisation of Eastern Iranians*, p. 205.





p 137 SACRED HOMA AND BARSAM PLANTS

“immortality”. Homa is also the name of an angel and in this connection Dr. Haug asserts :

There are many stories current in ancient times about the miraculous effect of the drinking of the Homa juice (a panacea for all diseases) which led to the belief that the performance of the ceremony of the angel Homa proves highly beneficial to body and soul.

But whether Zarathustra himself accepted this early Aryan practice or not remains to be investigated. Like several other angels, Homa is not mentioned in the Gathas ; but we have a verse : “When will the destruction of this *intoxicant* be averted ? ”<sup>1</sup> Some scholars try to read into this a reference to the Homa sacrifice. Even the god Indra is said to have been intoxicated by the Soma juice ! It seems strange, at any rate, that a plant “expelling death” should be denounced in this manner by the writers of a later date. Another plant called *barsam* is also mentioned in connection

<sup>1</sup> *Yasna*, xlviii, 10.



with the Yazashn ceremony, in which a certain number of its twigs are indispensable.

In the later *Avesta*, plants and trees are always highly praised side by side with waters. There is no systematic treatise on botany to be found; it is pointed out in the *Bundahishn*, however, that before the advent of Ahriman (the Devil) in this world vegetation was without thorn or bark. There are also mentioned some fifty-five species of grain, twenty-five of medicinal plants, 10,000 of principal plants and 1,000,000 of ordinary plants. Some thirty kinds of fruits were noticed, and to each angel and archangel is attributed a flower—the myrtle or jasmine is for Ahura Mazda, the white jasmine for Vohu Mano, the mouse-ear or sweet marjorum for Asha Vahish-ta, basil-royal for Kshathravairya, the marigold for Atash, the water-lily for Avan and so on.

The Iranians were a settled people and their economic life was well organised. They

knew the value of domestic animals which they not only used as helpers but also treated as friends of mankind. The dog, the horse and the camel were very useful. Their names were used as the proper names of great men, for example, Zarath-ushttra, Keres-aspa, Arejat-aspa and others.

The horse was used for riding, for drawing chariots and for agricultural purposes. Cows, sheep and goats too were highly valued; and milk, butter and cheese were used. *Mereghe-parodarsh*, the foreseeing fowl, is the name given to the domestic cock, which in the *Vendidad* is considered to be a symbol of the resurrection.

The dog was perhaps the most important of all domestic animals in Iran. Even now this animal is used by the Parsees for the Sag-did ceremony, in which a dead body during the *Gehsarna* is thrice shewn to the dog. There are different explanations given for this strange

practice. Some believe that the dog has the power of scaring away the evil spirit (Druj Nasu) that attacks a dead body, while others think that the custom originated from the idea of showing his food to the dog. It is possible also that dogs were used in this manner for identifying the bones of dead persons whose bodies were exposed on hills.

The *Vendidad* contains strict injunctions against treating the dog cruelly or killing him. "What a strange contrast," says Dr. Geiger, "between these precepts and the way in which dogs are now treated in Central Asia."<sup>1</sup> On the characteristics of this favourite animal there is a special chapter in the *Vendidad*,<sup>2</sup> which is the only canine literature in the *Avesta* available at present. Scholars are inclined to give a mystical interpretation of

<sup>1</sup> Geiger: *Civilisation of Eastern Iranians*, Vol. I (London, 1885), p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> *Vendidad*, xiii, § 44.

them, the dog being a symbol of "Will"; but the Countess Martinengo-Cesaresco says:

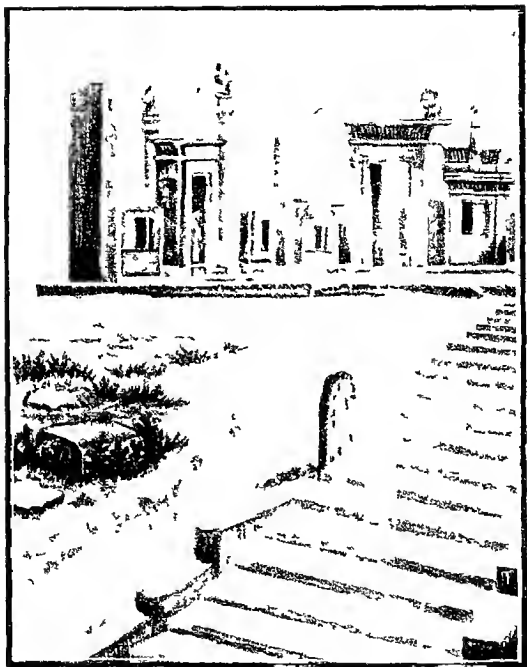
The eight characters of the dog show observation though not reverence; he loves darkness like a thief and at times is known to be one; he fawns like a slave, he is a self-seeker like a courtesan, he eats raw meat like a beast of prey. . . . The dog loves sheep like a child, he runs here and there in front like a child; he dodges in and out like a child.<sup>1</sup>

The Persians gave justice not only to human beings but also to the lower animals. If a dog misbehaved and attacked men or cattle, he too was punished, his limbs at the worst being cut off. But in any case the law forbade anyone to kill him. Says the Baroness, "In the pages of Avesta everything is tried to enforce humanity. . . . The cow and the horse, animals manifestly pure, which bring with them words of blessing, inflict terrible anathema on their tormentors."

<sup>1</sup> *The Place of Animals in Human Thought* (London, 1909), p. 152.

This sense of strict justice is a peculiarity of the Avestan race, and is an object-lesson to those who, under the guise of "mercy," pamper evil in this world. In the book of Arda Viraf, the Zoroastrian Dante, the story is told of a certain man called Dayanos, who was always known as a cruel and lazy governor of his province, but who one day was charitable enough to push with his right foot a bundle of grass towards a hungry ox. After his death his body lay all tormented by noxious animals except the right limb which was not touched by them at all!

*Architecture.*—The greatness of a civilised nation is also noticeable in its development of arts and crafts and in the encouragement given to the manufacture of objects of beauty. Architecture is one of the greatest of arts and there is not a shadow of doubt that there were skilful engineers, architects, and artists in Iran, with advanced knowledge of the science of





mathematics, or they could not have erected the huge monuments, the relics of which we still see in Persia, at Persepolis, Ctesiphon, Ecbatana, Hamadan, Taq-e-Bostan, Nakhshe-Shirin, Khosroe, and Parsagadae. The Achaemenian kings, Cyrus and Darius, built great palaces with innumerable pillars and lofty staircases. The Sassanian architects of Persia built huge tunnel-like halls and domes and arches. There were a hundred pillars in the palace of Persepolis, an exact copy of which was lately discovered and excavated at Pataliputra by Dr. Spooner; and the great pillars of Persepolis still bear witness to the splendours of ancient Iran. The arch of Ctesiphon surprised many a British soldier while passing through Mesopotamia during the great war. Its audience hall was 312 feet long, 175 feet broad, and 115 feet high.

In the *Sarosh Yasht* is mentioned: "A well-built palace with a hundred windows, a lofty



one with a thousand pillars, beautifully built, with ten thousand props.”<sup>1</sup> This resembles a description of the palace at Persepolis. Darius built palaces in hilly districts and used stones for his architectural monuments; while Noshervan the Just and other Sassanian rulers used bricks, and built in the low-lying districts of the Tigris-Euphrates valley.

The Achaemenians also carved bas-reliefs; cut in rocks their splendid Cuneiform inscriptions; and excelled in the construction and adornment of their pleasure-houses. “It is remarkable that the Persians were the only people of antiquity who knew how to make an architectural use of staircases.” Their sculptors too have left testimony of their artistic genius in the life-size figures of great Iranian personages on the rocks of Persia and on the walls of the palaces. The forms of their carriages, tables, and spectacles, and also the colossal

<sup>1</sup> *Sarosh Yasht*, § 21.

figures of wild animals show the influence of Assyria and Babylonia on Iran ; the figures of an umbrella and a fly-trap point to a possible imitation of Indian sculpture.<sup>1</sup>

*Music.*—Music was specially developed by the Sassanians; but the early Persians also knew very well the charm of poetry and music, so much so that the Gathas in their peculiar *padas* were meant to be chanted aloud. Regarding the subject of music, the following from the *Vendidad* is characteristic of the Avestan age : “ He (the dog) is fond of singing like a strolling-singer (modern *loori*) ; he is changeful like a strolling singer.”<sup>2</sup> It was in fact an age of religious verse, and was followed by the prosaic period of several centuries of Achaemenian and Parthian rule. Then Ardesheer Babekan renewed the scientific study of Persian music. He is said

<sup>1</sup> Geiger's *Civilisation of Eastern Iranians*, Vol. II, pp. 228, 272.

<sup>2</sup> *Vendidad*, xiii, 46.

to have had one whole division of musicians in his army, like the military bands attached to regiments in modern times. Behram V was also a great patron of music. But the greatest of all was Khosroe Parviz who had for his two court-singers, Barbad and Sargash. Barbad has done much for Persian music ; he was the founder of the famous Sassanian school which transferred the art from the patronage of kings to that of the people ; and there is no doubt that the Perso-Arabian musical system owes much to the Sassanian singer, Barbad, who carried the art to such perfection that he became the composer of three hundred and sixty melodies, one for each day of the year.

*Painting.*—We have seen before that the Iranians could manufacture colours. The walls of the palaces of Darius and Noshervan were beautifully painted ; and Persian pottery is an excellent example of the Persian genius

for this fine art. Even landscape painting was encouraged in Ancient Iran, and the art passed on to neighbouring nations both Eastern and Western.

*Magic.*—Professor Frachtenberg of Columbia<sup>1</sup> deserves credit for his special study of witchcraft in Iranian literature. This degraded word “magic” itself owes its origin to the Magi of the East and is derived from L. *magus* or Gk. *mageia*, meaning, according to the *International Encyclopedia*, “the pretended art of controlling occult forces and of producing effects contrary to the known order of nature”. It appears that such an art was pre-Zoroastrian. The Persian priests found difficulty in irradiating it from the Aryan mind and so tried to nullify its effect by means of manthras (Sk. *mantra*), etc. It is, however, clear that the attitude of Persia towards the black art was hostile throughout, and this is confirmed by the

<sup>1</sup> *Dastur Hoshang Memorial Volume*, pp. 401-450, Bombay, 1918.

institution of the two opposing powers, Spenta Mainyu and Anghra Mainyu, found in the later *Avesta*. With Anghra Mainyu there was a regular host of witches, wizards and other sinners whose influence was always counteracted by means of sacrifices and oblations to beneficent deities, like Ardui Sura, Behram and Tishtar Tir. Side by side with the evil spirits were the noxious creatures of Anghra Mainyu—snakes and wolves—that the true followers of the Iranian prophet were bound to extirpate from this world. According to the code of the *Vendidad* a sinner was punished by having to kill a certain number of injurious animals called *khrafastras*.

The Iranian spiritualists also believed in the evil eye, not only of wicked men and women but also of sick persons, especially of women during the menstrual period which it was believed was caused by Anghra Mainyu. Even the fond gaze of admiration caused a

certain amount of enchantment or magnetic effect which indirectly harmed the object of the admiration. The only remedy lay in the repetition of certain manthraic spells such as Ahunvar, Airyama Ishyo, Ashem Vohu and Yenghe Hatam, and in the counteracting effects of the good eye. Nails, hair, skin, etc. from living bodies, called heher, were always buried, lest they should fall into the hands of sorcerers who would then secure a malicious control over those to whom they originally belonged.

A good deal of superstition of all kinds, stellar, earthly and supernatural, in fact existed among the Iranians; and against these the Zoroastrian religion had an uphill task. In short, it is remarkable that the Ancient Persians should have devised means of destroying, or at least mitigating, the evil influences of the wicked magicians of their time. Evil, they firmly believed, could and should be crushed at any price.

*Miscellaneous.*—The digging of canals is attributed to Darius I, according to the *Shah Nameh*, the canal at Suez was first cut by him. Pictures on rocks were a novel feature in the prosperous reign of Darius, while the making of jewellery and of costumes were arts prevailing even in the early Avestan days. Ardui Sura Banoo is thus pictured in the *Avan Yasht* :

beautifully clad, with a golden crown, four-cornered ear-rings, a golden necklace, with a girdle on the middle of her body. On her head is a diadem set with a hundred stars, golden and eight-sided, with garments of skin and fur of beaver which have the most precious colours.<sup>1</sup>

Some enthusiastic followers of Zoroaster, taking a hint from Amman and H. S. Olcott believe that the Prophet possessed the knowledge of electricity, and that the whole system of Zoroastrian rituals was based on some occult scientific principles. The Nirangdin ceremony involves the sterilisation of metal

<sup>1</sup> *Avan Yasht*, §§ 128, 129.

pots in the holy flames; and the Afringan ceremony requires the priests to produce "thermo-electric currents" by chanting manthraic verses in front of the Fire, and by touching the fire-holder and the fire-urn and also by touching the skirts of one another. In the *Avan Yasht* as read by them is an allusion to "hydro-electric currents" produced by running waters when the sun's rays fall upon them. But the Parsee community needs a Bose or a Kelvin to justify these enthusiasts.



## CHAPTER VI

### AN HISTORICAL REVIEW

WE shall now take a review of the history of the Ancient Persians, whose religious system was so remarkably correlated to their moral, social, industrial and political institutions. Iran sprang like a rose from the graves of Nineveh and Babylon, amid the Egyptian and Indo-Aryan cultures, some five thousand years ago. It was a rose tinted with the bright hues of religion and life, and flung its fragrance far and wide for the amelioration of human suffering. It grew to an exceptional age, and even to-day history unfolds from its petals brilliant stories of noble kingship, noble citizenship, heroism and sacrifice.



MAP OF ANCIENT PERSIAN EMPIRE



As reliable an authority as Sir Percy Sykes<sup>1</sup> considers the Persian to be the first Aryan Kingdom. This opinion must arrest the attention of those who ignore the fact that Persia in the past played the part of a Mother Nation. Her political history goes so far back that it is impossible even to trace its beginnings in the mists of antiquity ; and so biased were the Greek and other historians that no fixed date has been arrived at, even for the Kyanian king, Gushtasp. Roughly speaking, the foundation of the future World-Empire took place about 3000 B.C. It was founded by King Gayomard, and is known as the Pishdadyan, in Airyanevaejo, which chiefly comprised the northern steppes of modern Turkestan and the contrasting Persian table-land—with its rigorous climate and yet wealth of flowers and fruits, with a desert at the heart of it but surrounded by snowy mountain

<sup>1</sup> *Persia*, Brigadier-General P. Sykes. (Oxford, 1922.)

peaks. The capital was at Balkh, in Bactria, and the Pishdadyan dynasty, headed by Gayomard, consisted of eleven kings. Gayomard was succeeded in the following order by ;—Hoshang, Tehmurasp, Jamshed, Zohak, Faridun, Minocheher, Nodar, Afrasiab, Jotemash, Kershasp.

#### DYNASTY I

The story of early Persian activities has a loose foundation in legends, traditions and myths which can at best only suggest facts, but which nevertheless cannot be altogether ignored. It should not surprise us then if, in a time-honoured legend, we are told that wild beasts like lions and tigers paid their homage to Gayomard on his coronation-day. His chief task was to civilise the savage tribes of Asia, for he was a born ruler ; but demons and giants fiercely opposed him. Among many improvements made by him were some in regard to clothing, agricultural production

and the building of dwelling-places for the ryots.

Of Hoshang, who introduced a system of agriculture, and of Tehmurasp, who built several cities, legend tells but little; and we pass on to Jamshed, the Yima of the *Avesta*, whose life is so well known to students of the *Vendidad*.<sup>1</sup> It was he, it is said, who at the dawn of the Golden Age extended the earth—its habitable parts chiefly—and who in the end grew so powerful that he was tempted to aspire to godhead, after the Great Flood. Jamshed was a contemporary of Noah. He instituted the Jamshed-i-Naoroz and founded the city of Persepolis.

Faridun and Zohak are well known compeers and the historic banner, the *Durufsh-i-Kawani*, originated with them. The former had three sons to each of whom he assigned a part of his territories during

<sup>1</sup> Chapter II.

There is a difference of opinion regarding the date of the late Kyanian kings who are believed by some historians to have flourished during the next dynasty. It is possible that Dara-i-Darayan was identical with Darius of whom we shall speak presently.

### DYNASTY III

True Persian history begins with the reign of Cyrus the Great who founded the Achaemenian dynasty, in the year 558 B.C. Before Cyrus, not only does the history of Persia remain uncertain, but we have no knowledge of any efforts made by Iran to gain the mastery of the then civilised world. Before him the Medians were the first Aryans to rise against the Semites of Central Asia. Apparently, the conflict with such foreign cultures as the Assyrian and Babylonian helped to shape Persia's future destiny, as is usual in the history of nations. The splendid

art of writing, Chaldean and Babylonian, was adopted by the Persians. The Cylinders of Nabonidus and of Cyrus—the latest archæological discoveries—reveal the historic truth that Cyrus was of double origin. He was king of Anshan at first, and after defeating Astyages is said to have captured Ecbatana in 550 B.C., thereby securing the ancient line of Persian rulers.

The Parsees who claim direct descent from this Founder of a world-wide Empire are known for their large-hearted and open-handed charity. What better example of generosity can be quoted than the order of Cyrus to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem<sup>1</sup> after the city had been taken by him from the Jews! This does not surely mean that he embraced the Jewish faith; but the act won for him a place in Old Testament history.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, Ch. xlv, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Ezra, Ch. i, 11.



Cyrus had to engage in two struggles, one against the Babylonians, the other against the Ionian Greeks, whose power extended to the borders of Asia Minor. Both Babylon and Ionia were at his feet when the time came for him to meet death.

Cambyses who succeeded him moved on to Egypt which was at last conquered; and he left for his great successor, Darius, the large territory extending from Sir Daria to the Nile and from the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea. Suicide, though the most heinous of sins according to Zoroastrianism, was the cause of the death of Cambyses. This tragedy was further accentuated by the appearance of a usurper who styled himself the younger brother of Cambyses.

It is now the great Darius who appears on the scene as the champion of Persian truth, liberty and suzerainty. He stands head and shoulders above any other ruler before or

[illegible]

The image shows a manuscript page with two columns of text. The left column is written in Voynich script, featuring a variety of symbols such as circles, lines, and dots. The right column is written in a cursive script, likely Latin, with some words in a larger, more decorative hand. The page is aged and shows signs of wear, including discoloration and some damage to the parchment or paper.



after him. He is the one emperor who organised an ideal rule for his subject nations. Words hot from his ever sincere heart, and fresh as when they left the sculptor's hands, shine out to-day from the rock of Behistun (a few miles from Hamadan) and proclaim to all the world, in the tri-lingual inscriptions, his triumph over falsehood and the wonderful size and governance of his empire. Thrace, Macedonia, the Panjaub and other parts of India were gradually annexed ; but here, again, the jealous and unreliable Greek historians give a notorious defeat to Darius in his attempt to conquer Hellas. The failure of the battle of Marathon is an historical puzzle which even the truthful records of Darius cannot solve for us ; but it appears from another alien account that the Persian defeat was due to the unwise policy of some Satraps, in halting to punish a petty State of Etruria, on their way to the Ionian Isles. In another place we are told

that Darius had an insufficient navy for conquest beyond the seas. The conquest of the West as well as of the East was the Emperor's ambition; and we are told that he was raising a second campaign against Hellas when death snatched him away in 485 B.C., in the midst of his activities. As a perfect sovereign Darius was unrivalled, says a Parsee historian of last century and this statement is borne out by Herodotus. He was really the Akbar of the Achaemenian age. His revenue was over three and a half millions sterling. Darius also struck two kinds of coins, the one, a *daric* of gold, equal to a £, the other, a *siglio*, equal to a shilling. Scholars differ on the point of the régime of Darius the Great in Indian History; and it appears from a review of "The Cambridge History of India" (Vol. I) that Hindu scholars are unwilling to give that credit to Darius.<sup>1</sup> However, no sound Indian scholar

<sup>1</sup> "Modern Review," Dec., 1922.

will deny the fact that in the rock-records of Asoka and Chandragupta, in the construction of palaces after the design of Persepolis, and in the invention of the Nagri and Kharosti types of writing, there is evidence of a considerable influence of Persian art and craftsmanship on India. As we shall presently see, even the Rulers of India were ever eager to gain the friendship of their Persian contemporaries. During the rule of Darius the Persian empire reached its zenith.

More decisive than Marathon was, according to foreign writers, the battle of Salamis in the year 480 B.C.; and yet it will not be out of place to quote here the words of Elizabeth Reed: "If Persia could have won the battles of Marathon and Salamis, the worship of Ormuzd might have been the prevailing religion of the whole world." For one reason or another it has also been said that Athens

was set on fire during the reign of the next Emperor, Xerxes, who had to give up Macedonia at the same time. But defeats could not shatter for yet another century and a half the empire which the Persian Akbar had established. The peaceful relations with the Greeks continued under his successor, Artaxerxes ; while Darius II took tribute from the Asiatic settlers of Greece, and Artaxerxes II, entitled " Mnemon " by the Greeks, was appointed arbitrator by them. But the downfall of the Achaemenian dynasty was soon to come, and the story of the struggle between the last-named king and his younger brother Cyrus, and of the retreat of the " Ten Thousand " after the battle of Cunaxa is too well known to need repetition here. Artaxerxes killed all the remaining members of the royal family ; but at the same time various Satraps, such as the Moghul governors of India, grew independent and were often troublesome.

Suffice it to say that, while Persia was thus substantially declining, the Macedonian king, Alexander, who according to the *Shah Nameh* was also of Persian origin, at once took advantage of the situation and sought not only to defeat but also to conquer Iran. The unlucky Darius III was thrice overpowered by Alexander, and yet the Persians stood heroically against their one-time ryots. The battles of Granicus in 334 B.C. and of Issus in 333 B.C. were decisive, while at Arbela, near Nineveh, the Persians made their last stand against their most powerful enemy, only to lose the enormous Aryan Empire for some centuries to come. Babylonia and Susa, Persepolis and Parsagadae, and even Herat and Sistan soon found in the Greeks their devastators. But Alexander's ambition was not to halt till he reached the furthestmost boundaries of Darius' Empire up to the Indus.



On the way he founded Kandahar and, crossing the Hindu Kush, soon came into conflict with Porus at Taxila. Only a mutiny among his Greek troops prevented his further progress. A fleet at Jhelum was then sent down the river Indus and thence to the Arabian sea until, through Baluchistan and the Persian desert of Loot, the Conqueror returned to Susa. The Royal Library of Persepolis was given as fuel to the same flames which the Zoroastrian lords had worshipped in its wonderful palace, the ruins of which can still be seen a few miles from Shiraz. Thus ended the third great dynasty of the Ancient Persian Kings in the year 330 B.C.

#### DYNASTY IV

Truly speaking, the Parthian Period of Persian history is a gap. The Parthians probably were descendants of some Persian tribes. For nearly four centuries the iron

rule of these Parthian Kings exhausted the country's wealth and its credit in the world. Slavery was its curse and the country was continually hot with conflicts with the Greeks and even with the Romans who were just rising in Italy. Two kings, Mithridates the Great whose influence reached as far as India and the Euphrates, and Vologeses whose coins are available to-day, are well known. The last of the line, King Ardavan, was thrice defeated by Ardasheer Babekan who saved the Persian dominions in the very nick of time.

#### DYNASTY V

Descended from a purely Persian and royal family, Ardasheer soon brought about the resurrection of the Zoroastrian Empire and in the memorable year A.D. 226 the great glory of the Persian Aryans was revived by him. Soon he challenged the Roman Empire

which was his great rival in Europe at the time, and asked for tribute from the Indian Princes on the Persian borders. Severus Alexander was defeated, Armenia was retaken and then, when the country and the Empire were settled, he turned his attention to peaceful pursuits, such as the revival of learning and the installation of the Magi as State priests. One of his maxims is worthy of note : " There can be no power without an army, no army without money, no money without agriculture, and no agriculture without justice." The *Book of the Karnamak* is full of his romantic deeds and is one of the best Pahlavi works extant to-day.

Shahpur the First, who succeeded him in A.D. 240, invaded Syria and fought the Romans whose Emperor, Valerian, he captured. Shahpur also founded the city Nishapur and during his reign Mani, the heretic, appeared as an advocate of Christ in Iran. The kings who succeeded Shahpur





p 169 HEAD OF SHAHPUR  
THE GREAT

are not known for any policy of aggrandisement or any other important political decision excepting the murder of Mani, until we come to Shahpur the Great who ascended the throne in A.D. 309 and who, next to Louis XIV of France, is said to have had the longest reign registered in history. He punished the Arabs first of all and then rid himself of the Christian propagandists of Rome, especially the monks and nuns. The Emperor Julian suffered heavy defeat in the beginning but he regained courage and marched down the Euphrates and also crossed the Tigris. But the strongly fortified capital of Madain (Ctesiphon) was not within his reach, and he was mortally wounded while returning to Byzantium. Jovian, his successor, was also conquered by Shahpur who ultimately imposed upon him a "heavy treaty".

We then pass over four other rulers and come to the famous poet-emperor Behramgore

in the year A.D. 420. The White Huns from the north-eastern frontier of Iran first received his attention, and were routed beyond the Oxus. To non-plus his enemies he is said to have ordered each of his soldiers to fix on his saddle a leather-bag with pebbles in it, so that when the army marched the tremendous noise would frighten them. Firoz the Third, descendant of Behramgore, who ruled from A.D. 459 to 487 had also to fight the white Huns. But these could not be finally destroyed until the reign of Kobad I in A.D. 501 after the unsuccessful attempts of two minor kings. Peace with Byzantium was again broken by this sovereign. Mazdak, a Persian revolutionary, succeeded in stirring up the Persians against the king and Kobad was dethroned ; but the Turks came to his help and reinstated him.

Now comes Noshervan the Just who ruled over Iran from A.D. 531 to 579. He comes to the fore in the Sassanian stage to regain full

prestige for Persia. He made peace with the Romans and exacted from them a war indemnity of five thousand pounds of gold. He was also successful with the White Huns, finally annexing part of their territory. Always a conqueror, and honoured not only among his own subjects but also among his contemporaries in other parts of the world, his friendship was sought even by the kings of far off China and Sindh. This second Darius won laurels as the wisest ruler of Iran. His name is a synonym among Persians for justice, and equity was his favourite subject. He also organised land taxes in money, raised a standing army, reclaimed waste lands, made roads, and encouraged learning in the University of Ctesiphon. His architectural designs are still to be seen in the wonderful monuments of Taq-e-Kesra, the scene of General Townsend's struggles in Mesopotamia during the Great War.



Nosherwan was succeeded by Hormuzd IV, a very weak and cruel monarch who was not capable of following in the footsteps of his illustrious predecessor. The last great king of the Sassanian dynasty was Kushroe Parviz, who conquered parts of Mesopotamia and Palestine. He also invaded the Byzantine Empire in A.D. 602. Later, Damascus and Jerusalem were taken, and Kushroe is said to have carried away in triumph to Persia the original wooden cross on which Jesus Christ had been crucified. This naturally enraged Heraclitus who rallied Christendom against his heathen foe, but with little success.

No other Persian monarch known to history held so splendid a Court, or was a better patron of letters than Kushroe Parviz and his beautiful queen, Shirin; but, sad to say, it was just in this very reign that the Empire began unmistakably to decline. And this time Khalid, a much worse foe than his

predecessors, came forth from Arabia to devastate the country and ruin its creed.

During the reign of Kobad II (A.D. 628 to 629) the members of the Royal Family were assassinated and State intrigues became frequent. Three other but minor rulers, including Queens Puranmikht and Azarmidokht, passed away before the fatal ending, which came during the rule of the unfortunate Yezdezard III, who was the great-grandson of Kushroe Parviz and who reigned from A.D. 632 to 651. The Arabs had begun to rise as surely as the Persians had begun to fall. Disunion in the different parts of the Empire, and the spread of Islam in the deserts of Arabia, brought an end to the once glorious epoch of Ancient Persian sovereignty. Yezdezard met with heavy defeats and losses. The battles of Cadesia in A.D. 636 and Nahavand in A.D. 642 completed the destruction of Airyanevaejo.

The Kyanian glory had forever departed ; doomed was Iranian sovereignty ; doomed the Zoroastrian faith. From that evil day the decay of Persia was inevitable. The Sun of Iran set and the Crescent of the Caliphs rose. The cry of the Muezzin rang clear while that of the Mobed was suppressed. Some Zoroastrians yielded to the cruel sword of Islam and embraced the Koran, while others still burned the Holy Fire stealthily in caves. Black ruin was everywhere and the cries to Allah shut out the wailing of the dying Magi. Thus the fate of Persia lay in the hands of the Caliphs led by Omar, whose authority was unwillingly acknowledged. Sad, the hero of the battle of Cadesia, was ordered by Omar to gain the mastery over Mesopotamia, and later on the Caliph adopted the royal robes at Madayan. The power of the Caliphate continued for a number of years during which the Persian nobles retired mortified to the extreme.

The Omayyad dynasty, which was later on replaced by the Abbassid and which included Haroun-al-Raschid of the Golden Age of Islam, upheld the rights of the Caliphate until there arose in Persia a number of small and local dynasties conflicting with one another. Still later there came the more powerful and independent dynasty of Seljuk which was of Turkish origin and which gave a great impetus to Mahommedanism in the country. But Persia had been shattered by the last national blow, and invader after invader came to complete its downfall. The Mongol, Chengiz Khan, and the Turkish Tamerlane received their share of Persian wealth and power. But were the real Persians, even yet, extirpated? All these centuries they were, calmly and with enormous patience, awaiting opportunities to regain even a tithe of the old splendours of their dear land. The Arabs who came and conquered, the Turks

and others who followed them in the game of usurpation, could not stay forever. It seemed as if the substance of things Persian remained the same even after the Sassanian downfall; only the creed of the country was altered. Persian conversions to Islam predominated under the foreign rule, yet the Zoroastrian Fire was still burning in the *Atashkadehs* of Iran.

There must have been inter-marriages between the various royal families of Arabia and of Persia, giving the Persians still some part in the government of their country. The House of the Safavis, who are supposed to have descended from the Seventh Imam and indirectly from a Persian source, was the first national dynasty after the fall of the Sassanids. Thus old Persia and young Arabia laboured together to keep themselves as happy as they could, and took an equal share in the administration and growth of the country,

up to the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The last Safavi kings, Shah Abbas, Shah Safi, and Shah Sultan Hussein were weak and wicked, and it is no wonder the Afghans soon over-powered them and dominated Persia. But the original Persians were still able to sail their ships in the stormy seas. How long could the Stars help even the Afghans? They too shared the ill-luck of Yezdezard and were ultimately overpowered. Nadir Shah invaded Persia about the year A.D. 1730, and both the Turks and the Afghans had to vacate the country. A strong Persia was what was needed now against such frequent foreign attacks; and Nadir Shah, the Afghan Shepherd, was at last welcomed to the throne of Darius and Noshervan. The famous Peacock Throne was triumphantly taken by Nadir Shah from the capital city of India to Persia, his new home. History is quite clear on this point.

After many conquests and a glorious reign, it is said that this Asiatic Napoleon was assassinated, and Iran once more saw a dynasty (called the Zand) apparently of the old Persian Stock. Even during this period the progress of the unhappy land was retarded by Pretenders of all sorts claiming the throne.

At last we come to the Kajar dynasty whose descendants still sit on the Peacock Throne in Teheran, and who still try to steer the country to a constitutional goal. A new element is introduced into Persia—Russian and British influence; and Russo-Persian and Anglo-Persian Treaties come into force. By a treaty in 1875 the Shah of Persia acknowledged the independence of Afghanistan, and the constitutional movement has begun in Persia itself, but with little success as yet.

Mahomad Ali Shah, the last ruler of Persia, was becoming unpopular and on his retirement his young son ascended the Persian

Throne, in the year 1914, under the title of Sultan Ahmed Shah, with a Regent belonging to the Kajar family. During the Great War the position of Persia was very critical. The British campaign in Mesopotamia against the Turkish allies of Germany cost the Empire a great deal. It was with great difficulty that the situation was saved and peace restored, at least for the present.

Brigadier-General Sir P. Sykes has drawn his own conclusions regarding Persia's future :

In Persia the unexpected may always be expected. . . . The situation is gloomy. Persia will not fight to defend herself, and her treasury is empty. She has turned her back on her old friend Great Britain, who, for the time being at any rate, must leave her to seek her own salvation unaided. The Financial Adviser and his staff have left Teheran. The South Persia Rifles, which alone stand between security and anarchy in the province of Fars, have been disbanded, and European women and children are leaving Shiraz. Elsewhere conditions are deteriorating, the Ministers at Teheran having little control over the provinces. The friends of Persia watch her present plight with sorrow, and hope that, before it is too late, the country will



realise that it is marching down the broad road that leads to destruction.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, there are other sympathisers of Persia who are of opinion that Persia has suffered, not from wrongs of her own creating, but from wrongs due to foreign influences. Even during the period of the Great War, it was intended to preserve her neutrality till the last ; but her own geographical situation as a link between Europe and Asia brought her into trouble. In short, Persia politically is between the jaws of the Powers that surround her.

Herself forming a political unit of Mahomedans, Jews, Armenians and Zoroastrians, diametrically opposite in their religious views, Persia is being pressed by foreign nations into an unbearable condition of subjection.

A modern student of Persia writes :

The history of the wrongs to which Persia has been subjected is so long, and the treatment to which

<sup>1</sup> Sykes—*Persia*, p. 179 (Oxford, 1922).

she has been exposed so cruel that it will be hard to find an analogy in another quarter of both the hemispheres. This country has been systematically robbed of her sovereign rights as an independent nation. Gradual, continuous and insidious assaults have been made upon her integrity. It was nearly a century ago, to be more accurate in 1828, that her sea power was crippled. She was deprived of the right to build her own railways by the infamous instrument of 1889. In 1900 she was coerced into raising loans in foreign countries. For the long period from 1828 to 1903 she was prevented from regulating her import and export tariff. In 1910 the galling restriction was imposed upon her that she could not grant concessions for commercial and industrial enterprises to any foreigner, without the consent of her two tyrannic neighbours between whom, as between the nether and upper stones of a mill, it was sought slowly to crush her. In 1911 the mandate was issued that this independent country shall entertain no foreigners in her service. In 1912 an agreement was wrung from her to keep no standing army. She was coerced in 1907 into recognising the Anglo-Russian Convention which dissected the land of Iran into spheres of influence for the Russian octopus and the British bagman. A large number of political and economical pacts, coupled with conditions incompatible with her independence as a sovereign state, were further showered upon Persia. . . .

Persia neither makes unreasonable demands nor impossible claims. She asks for nothing more than the exercise of her birth-right, to be liberated from subtle coercion, to be admitted to the comity of nations with equal rights and to enjoy their legitimate support and help, in order that the country may have an opportunity to revive and work out its own salvation.<sup>1</sup>

Can the League of Nations come to the aid of this "minor" nation to-day?

<sup>1</sup> G. K. N. in *Sanj Vartaman*, Annual Number, 1922, pp. 14, 15.

## CHAPTER VII

### ASPECTS OF ANCIENT PERSIAN LIFE

SO the Sun of Ancient Persia rose and shed its lustre brightly for a long period ; then it set, only to return again and again. Many were the satellites that received their illumination from this parent Light and then departed to far-off places. Would that their votaries should acknowledge and value the parenthood of Persia !

*Persian Character.*—What then is the inheritance that we have received from the land of the Sun ? Influential to the extreme, the lords of Persia were always eager to preserve the precious heritage of Zarathustra's creed and pass it on to succeeding generations. The continuity of the Zoroastrian religion,

civilisation, and vitality cannot but surprise the modern world.

The literary and religious histories of Persia run parallel to the political. With the rise and fall of the various dynasties the literature of the land saw its ups and downs. In fact the patronage of the rulers was essential to its preservation and growth throughout these centuries. And even the age-old pages of the extant Avestan and Pahlavi literatures reveal to us the true character of the ancient Persian race.

Throughout these periods one is struck by the remarkable religious tolerance of the ruling race. Zoroastrianism, in spite of its church militant in the earlier period, never allowed the sword or the gallows as the alternative to conquered nations. The good points of the state religion of Persia, its total absence of idolatry and of unintelligible demon-worship, its moral struggle for Truth, its cheerful

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labour and, above all, its intensely active benevolence could, without any compulsion, draw even the roughest human souls to itself. There was no religious bigotry, persecution or intolerance of any sort in the Persian heart.

### PERIOD I

Persia's lesson of settled life in the early Pishdadyan and Kyanian days was a great boon to the youthful world. Even with the pastoral nature of pre-Gathic life, the *Shah Nameh* says, literary works were encouraged and composed even by the kings themselves. Men used iron implements and the world had already passed beyond the rawness of the Stone Age.

### PERIOD II

Kyanian culture was a sublime combination of the early Aryan religion with the refined church established by Zoroaster. Society was

organised, and the Prophet's encouragement to agriculture and other peaceful pursuits toned down the inherent roughness in human nature. The joint-family system; the principles of division of labour applied to society as a whole, which was conveniently divided into the four classes of *Athornan* (priests), *Ratheshtar* (warriors), *Vastrayosh* (peasants), and *Hutokhsh* (labourers); the high sense of the State in giving freedom to the fair sex; the happy relations between the teacher and the taught; the foundation of education on religion and morality; the patronage of the kings given to the priestly class in general; the sense of justice with due mercy in all legal affairs, and the just punishment awarded to criminals and sinners—all these are conspicuous in the Scriptures. But the most striking features of Kyanian civilisation were its glorious womanhood and its recognition of sex equality. Malcolm says :

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The great respect in which the female sex was held was, no doubt, the principal cause of the progress they had made in civilisation. Women were at once the cause of generous enterprise and its reward.

How very significant is this lesson in real chivalry in relation to the awakening of Asian womanhood to-day.

### PERIOD III

Coming to the Achaemenian period (558 to 330 B.C.), we notice that even the foreigners who came in contact with the Persians had nothing but praise for their courage and power of organisation. For one reason the Achaemenians were very popular with their neighbours; they were kind to their enemies and tolerant of foreigners when they visited them or settled in their country. They were also a very adaptable people, in that they accepted all that was good in aliens and



imitated not only their good customs and manners but also their cultural systems. The Greeks were the first to influence them as a new nation, and these they loved for their patriotism and their commercial enterprise. The Achaemenian youths were taught three things at school—to speak the truth, to ride on horse-back and to draw the bow. This in itself shows how inseparable were religion and life in the minds of the *alumni* of the University of Persepolis. Scouting,<sup>1</sup> which the modern world takes pride in calling its own, was instituted on sound lines for the first time by the Achaemenian worthies. Young boys were trained to watch and report any intrusion of doubtful persons into fortresses in the time of peace, and to do night-duty, by giving intelligence of the enemy during the periods of war. In any case, whenever they obtained some useful news,

<sup>1</sup> Herodotus, vii, 208. Xenophon *Cyropaedia*, 6. 3, 5, 6.



ROCK OF BEHISTUN



the captain of the scouts was promptly informed by them.

But they had their faults as well. According to Rawlinson, luxury was the chief cause of their downfall; and unbalanced passions both in peace and war only marred the sublime system of morality imposed upon them by Zoroaster. It has been said that, if Darius III had been even one-tenth Darius I, the arch-enemies of Persia could not have done so much harm to the country as Alexander was able to do.

#### PERIOD IV

The Parthians (230 to 225 B.C.) had their own evil customs. Slave-trading was rampant in their provinces, and something like the serfdom of feudal times prevailed also in Iran at the time. But the constant conflicts with the Greeks and Romans, as we saw in

chapter VI, completed the sorrowful tale. It is only for the manner in which they still kept the Holy Fire burning in the country, however feebly, that we must be grateful to them. The Greek civilisation, vastly inferior to the Persian, did not touch the hearts and minds of the people to any great extent; and after it came the iron rule of five centuries of Sassanian monarchy which saved the situation.

#### PERIOD V

The Sassanian government (A.D. 226 to 651) was then a great relief. We have noticed how the Empire came into collision with the Byzantine Empire about the year A.D. 330. Truly speaking, in Europe, it was an age of treachery augmented by the harm done by the priests and women of those times. The only good thing they did was to keep alive Greek Learning and Art.

In Rome there was a reign of slavery also, and the cruel gladiatorial combats were a proof of the depravity into which human nature had fallen, and from which it could only be raised by the teachings of Christianity.

In Egypt the old gods were out of fashion and the spirits of the Pharaohs, if they visited their favourite temples, found but broken idols.

To all these the House of Sassan supplied the kindlier light of human goodwill and peace. Their efforts in the revival of letters exceeded those of the Achaemenians and Parthians. The Book of the *Dinkard*, written in the somewhat ambiguous Pahlavi language, is full of treatises on philosophical, social and moral themes. It is the best summary prepared by the Sassanians, and gives an idea of the vast store of learning which the Persians still lovingly preserved at the Zand-e-Shahpur, long before the Arabs completed

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their game of the looting of learning. Even in original literature they showed their genius, excelling in romance and in mathematics. What great scholarship the Sassanian Persians must have possessed to have put up bi-lingual inscriptions all over their dominions!

Scholars concur in their estimate of the ability of the Sassanians as judges and law-givers. The famous system of trial by ordeal was theirs, and moral as well as spiritual wrongs received equal attention. They were great sportsmen and also loved music and painting. Ibn Khaldin repeats the well-known saying: "Were knowledge in the Pleiades (Seven Stars), some of the Persians would reach it." The story of Noshervan's chief physician, Phiroze, who was sent to the banks of the Ganges to secure a transcript of Pilpay's fables is well known. Such healthy intercourse between India and Sassanian Persia could only benefit both countries.

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One of the finest things which these Persians accomplished was the impetus they gave to Spiritualism. The Magi are well known for their arts of manthra, divination, dream-reading and contact with the world of yazads and ameshaspands. Although the later Persians were proficient in this white magic, they all abhorred sorcery and witchcraft. The Sassanians were fatalists of the first order and believed in the part the stars and the spirits played in human life ; but they never misused their powers to the extent of falling into the abyss of the black art.

As is definitely stated in the preceding chapter when Arabia conquered Persia a few Arabs only came and settled in the land. The character of the nation was not changed.

Though Ormuzd was ignored and Allah worshipped in the one-time Zoroastrian temples, even by the votaries of Light, it was the Arab that was Persianised and not *vice*



*versa*. The Persian converts to Islam not only preserved their own ancient culture but also grafted the Semitic upon it. The best example of this outward change but inner stability was Firdousi, the author of the *Shah Nameh*, who, though a Mahommedan by birth, endeavoured to chronicle the cultural episodes of Iran in his sixty thousand couplets. The national character of Persia found its best expression in this Parsee epic. It is the unique poetical work of Persia, its writer being at heart a true Persian. The history of Persis, which was tossed into oblivion by his own race, survived at the hands of this great patriotic singer; and the name and fame of many a Persian hero are immortalised by him in his elegant and stirring verse. The ethical and religious elements preserved to-day in the Hymns of the poet-prophet Zoroaster, and the epic elements which lay in embryo in the Yashts and Nyaishes of the post-Gathic epoch,

find therein the fullest and most appropriate expression. Persia's heroism is shewn at its best in this life-work of Firdousi.

Apart from isolated phases of harmony, the persecution of the Zoroastrian settlers in Persia at the hands of the Moslems, whether converted or born, is proverbial ; but in this respect the followers of the Prophet Mahommed transgressed the commandment of their own Teacher.

Out of those who do not follow one religion, these (Parsi) people are good and noble, and it befits the Mahommedans, and it is their duty, to give regard for their honour and dignity. Those people who will be good to these (Parsi) people will be counted as having deserved well of them ; but of those who ill-treat these people, I will be the enemy on the Day of Judgment, and such people will not enter Heaven.<sup>1</sup>

But no stormy blast could ever extinguish the Holy Light in Persia. In some sort of

<sup>1</sup> Firman—from the Prophet to his son-in-law, Hazrat Ali. It was written by Hazrat Ali by the order of the Prophet Mahommed in the presence of Abubaker, Omar, Oosman, Talib, Jabar, and Abdul Rahman, in the year 9 Hejira.

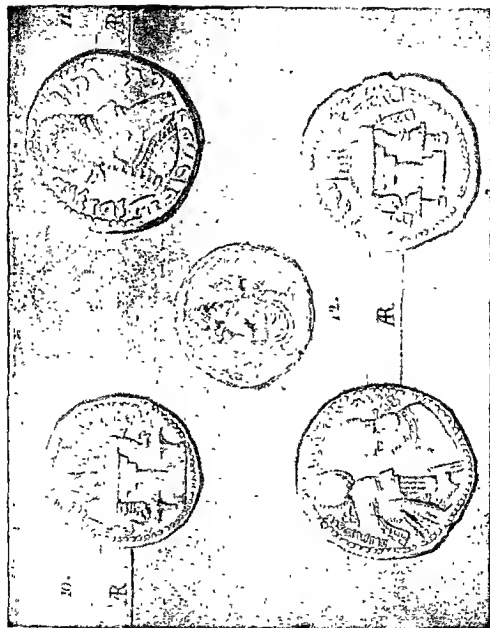
subdued tones it has shone out. There are not a few Persians who have sworn fealty to Baha Ullah and the founders of Sufism at the present time, betraying still their true Persian character.

*Persian Influence.*—Such a continuation of Persian ideals throughout some twenty-five centuries could not but have a healthy influence on the moral and material welfare of the world. Both the European and the Asian systems of philosophy and art owe much to Zoroaster and his race. Ancient Persia has influenced Vedic India, Greece, Rome, Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, Spain, Afghanistan, the Punjab, Sind, Modern India, and the Far East.

At the shrine of the Holy Flame all these nations came to light their lamps and illumine their homes.

1. The discovery of the *Zend-Avesta* by Anquetil du Perron in 1771, the translation





of the Behistun Cuneiform inscriptions of Darius by Major Rawlinson, and the recent discoveries of old Persian coins, cylinders, plates, etc., together with a general study of the Avestan and Pahlavi languages by Sanskrit scholars have enriched the science of Philology started by Burnouf in Germany.

Comparative philology shows how very akin Sanskrit and Avestan are. The Vedic gods claim relationship with the Avestan yazadas, the poetry of the five Gathas resembles the prosody of the Rig-Veda, the daevas of Zoroastrianism are akin to the asuras of Brahmanism. In fact Vedic India and Gathic Persia appear to have had a common religious fountain-head. But whereas later there were developments of Hinduism into polytheism or pantheism, the religion of the Persian Aryans had always a practical moral code crowned with pure monotheism. Only the other day the Poet-Laureate of Asia declared that the Iranian

monotheism was more ethical than the Indian.<sup>1</sup> Professor MacDonell of Oxford says :

Had the reform of Zoroaster been ineffectual, the sister religions (e.g., Brahmanism and Confucianism) would not have been so differentiated.<sup>2</sup>

While the various gods of terror and trouble, along with others of a good character like Mithra (Av. *Meher*) and Agni (Av. *Atar*), were propitiated by the Hindus, the Avestan angelology was devoid of any such polytheistic traits. But in the Avestan and Vedic times we find many resemblances of culture—the use of metals like silver, gold, copper, the taming of wild beasts for domestic purposes, the high position of women, the poetical effusions similar in *padas*, and even the conception of the deity Ahura. While this last idea later lost its hold on the Indian Aryans, Zarathustra gave it an upward tendency and left for Iran a loftier creed.

<sup>1</sup> Lecture on "Zoroastrianism," at Bombay, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Lecture at Lahore, 1923, on "Brahmanism".

2. Professor Max Muller says :<sup>1</sup>

If by the grace of Ahura Mazda, Darius had crushed the liberty of Greece, the purer faith of Zoroaster might easily have superseded the Olympian fables . . . if the battles of Marathon and Salamis had been lost and Greece had succumbed to Persia, the state religion of the empire of Cyrus might have become the religion of the whole civilised world.

But Greece had its share of Persian culture indirectly through the Persian colonies both on the Asiatic borders and in Greece. This influence was through Mithraism which religion Artaxerxes II had definitely set up in Persia. Assyria accepted Mithra as Mylitta and Greece as Aphrodite. Mithra, the Persian angel of Light, was installed on the summits of lofty mountains in Persia, but became the arch-deity of his votaries in Greece and in Rome also. Says M. Renan, "If the world had not become Christian, it would have become Mithraistic." We have also the evidence of Gobineau who in his *Histoire des Perses* writes

<sup>1</sup> J. J. Modi • *Dante Papers* (Bombay, 1914), p. 111.



that Persia under Darius gave much that was good to Greece. Professor Darmesteter is also of that opinion. Socrates and Plato whose names are synonymous with Western philosophy, could not have escaped the Persian influence, when Alexander conquered Persia. Plato's "Forms" are conceived, for example, in the same manner as the Avestan *Fravashis*.

3. Mithraism was transferred to Rome in the first century A.D. as Mgr. Baron C. Harlez concludes:

About the beginning of the Christian era the cult of Mithra, confounded with the Sun, absorbed some Semitic elements and spread over the west of Persia and even into Europe.<sup>1</sup>

4. If it was war as well as commerce in the Greeco-Persian era which pushed Mithraism outward into the West, it was the martial character of the deity alone that attracted the Romans who next met the Persians.

<sup>1</sup> In his *Introduction to the Avesta*: Translated by P. A. Wadia (Bombay, 1922), p. 151.

Dr. Dhalla in his *Zoroastrian Theology* has also drawn a similar conclusion :

Zoroastrian in its basic principles, Mithra's cult was soon surcharged with Semitic accretions and spread far and wide under this new syncretic form . . . This warlike trait of Mithra even appealed strongly to the martial instincts of the Roman armies that poured forth into the Parthian regions.

Mithra's cult was introduced in the West by these soldiers and his votaries existed in Rome under Pompey (67 B.C.) The Iranian divinity rapidly conquered vast dominions for his cult in Europe and brought a large multitude of votaries from distant lands to his feet. Mithra was officially recognised in A.D. 307 by Diocletian as the protector of his Empire and Mithraism proved a formidable rival of Christianity until the end of the fourth century A.D.<sup>1</sup>

According to Professor Franz Cumont, the influence of Mithraism reached not only Rome but the Balkan Peninsula, Italy, the Rhine-lands, Spain, Latin Africa and even Britain.

It is interesting to note here that to the English vocabulary Persia has contributed

<sup>1</sup> Dhalla : *Zoroastrian Theology* (New York, 1914), p. 187.

through Latin such words as paradise, peach, orange, pistachio, jasmin, lilac, and narcissus. This shows how the pendulum of Persian culture swung from the spiritual to the material worlds.

Mithraism soon had its powerful rival in Christianity in Italy. Its cumbrous mythical character soon gave place to the aggressive and practical character of the religion of Jesus Christ; and during the fourth century A.D. very little trace of it was left in Rome. Its influence spread rapidly and other lands were affected.

4. In Egypt also the way was cleared for the "new Deity" whom Ptolemy, the saviour after Alexander, installed in the land, after Cambyzes had broken the idols of the Egyptian gods. This religious reform initiated by Ptolemy in North Africa under a non-Zoroastrian title is a direct proof of the imperceptible Zoroastrian influence in foreign lands.

The Rev. Charles Kingsley in *Alexandria and Her Schools* bears testimony to this.

5. *Most of the World Prophets are born in Asia, and Persia must have prepared the Way for those Prophets who came after Zarthustra.* Cyrus the Great, instead of converting Asia Minor to his own faith, showed his generosity to the conquered Jews by handsomely contributing to their temple fund. At the same time the Jewish religion could not remain uninfluenced by Persia. Dr. Mills, the greatest authority on the Gathas, has been at pains to prove, in *Our Own Religion in Ancient Persia*,<sup>1</sup> that the Jewish and Zoroastrian Scriptures are analogous. In the like nature of their deity, the doctrine of resurrection and a future life, the conception of heaven and hell, the evil spirit, the temptation of the devil and the personal and universal judgments,

<sup>1</sup> Mills: *Our Own Religion in Ancient Persia*, (Leipzig, 1913), pp. 1—33.

Jesus Christ found his new followers already instructed by the Persian priests.

Later still, when Mithraism was just declining, there arose in Sassanian Persia a leader, called Mani, of one of the sectarian movements then prevalent. Educated at Ctesiphon in the Scriptures of both the nations then at war, the Persians and the Romans, Mani introduced a combined system of Magism and Christianity. Naturally he had little support from orthodox monarchs like Shahpur and Beheramgore. Manichaeism is essentially a "consistent uncompromising dualism," with a distinctly ascetic and pessimistic tendency. It is a mingling of "an ancient mythology and thoroughgoing materialistic dualism with an exceedingly spiritual and simple worship, and strict morality".

Soon it spread through Persia, Mesopotamia, Transoxiana, Greece and Rome, and about the year A.D. 339 it reached its climax in the

Roman world. Because Christianity was patronised in its entirety by the world conquerors of Rome, Manichaeism at last failed ; but it had a lasting effect on the Catholic church till the beginning of the thirteenth century even. The followers of Mani also carried the Faith to the East as far as Western China.

6. Europe fell into the long slumber of the Dark Ages and, meanwhile, the spiritual state of Asia was no better. The sad tale of Persia's fall has already been told ; under the stagnant waters of the Arabian stream the spirit of Zoroastrianism lay buried long ; but Zoroastrian ideals had been already absorbed by the ruling folk. The precious lore that lay hidden in the Gang-e-Shapigan and the Dez-e-Napisht was merely transferred to the Arabian schools. The richness of the Arabic literature is proverbial. When and where could it have been secured ? In the desert regions and among the wandering tribes of Arabia !

Its birth in the post-Sassanian epoch is quite significant. Professor Darmesteter, in his *Histoire de la Parse*, speaks eloquently of the Ancient Persian influence on Mahommedan civilisation: "The new beliefs the Arabs brought to the Persians were old acquaintances of the Zoroastrians."

The influence of Iran on Moslem literature and ideals<sup>1</sup> is shown in a beautiful book, written by M. Inostranzev and translated by G. K. Nariman. In it the author has endeavoured to show that, from the time of the Abbaside Khalifs and Turkish Seljuks down to that of the Arab tribes themselves, Iran's influence was felt by her conquerors. Even in the pre-Moslem epoch Sassanian Persia produced a powerful effect, political as well as cultural, on parts of Arabia. The best example was the kingdom of the Lekhmides in the south-western portion of the Sassanian empire:

<sup>1</sup> *Iranian Influence on Moslem Literature* (Bombay, 1918), Part I

It played its part most beneficially for Persia, holding back on the one hand the Roman-Byzantine onrush from the West, and on the other restraining the perpetual attempts at irruption into Persian territory by Arab nomadic tribes.<sup>1</sup>

Also, after the Arabian conquest of Persia, the Arabs themselves "were compelled to preserve a considerable deal of the past".<sup>2</sup>

The Parsi clergy, continues the author, are believed to have been the preservers and transmitters of the Persian literary tradition to the Arabs; and this is divided into the scientific, epico-historic, legendary and ethico-didactic elements. Sassanian Persia is well-known for some scientific works, originally received from the Greeks in the West and from the Semitic and Indo-Aryan races in the East; these were, *in toto*, passed on to the succeeding rulers. Persia's great epics and historical

<sup>1</sup> *Iranian Influence on Moslem Literature* (Bombay, 1918), Part I, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.



writings have also been valued by the Moslem community.

Among the ethical and didactic works mentioned in the *Fihrist* there are some forty-four, a large number of which "can be directly traced to Persian origin and another portion was evidently written under Persian influence".<sup>1</sup> Proverbs, maxims, testaments are chiefly to be discovered as translations in Moslem literature, the Adab style being the most prominent. It is not difficult to see how these influences would mould Moslem morals and Moslem conduct. In the *Fihrist* are also given a number of translators, Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian, of several Pahlavi books on epical, historical and ecclesiastical subjects. "This great influence which Parsi ethics have exercised on Islam has been attested by a number of Greek and Christian witnesses."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Iranian Influence on Moslem Literature* (Bombay, 1918), Part I, 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57

7. Thus illuminated by Persia, Arabia goes to the aid of dark Europe, through Spain. It was through the Moors, who dominated Europe, via Egypt and Spain, that the rays of the Light were reflected and the western continent saved. The renaissance in Italy was the result of this indirect Asian influence on Europe. Says the Parsee scholar, Dr. J. J. Modi in his *Dante Papers* :

If Protestant Christians take the Reformation of Luther as a turning-point in the history of Christianity and as a landmark exerting some puritanic influence on it, some credit for that may be given to Mahommedanism, because its votaries' stay in Europe for a long time had prepared the way for the Reformation by the spread of knowledge. Mahomedan universities in Spain were the seats of learning in those times, and they helped the spread of knowledge which prepared the way for the Reformation.

In the words of another Parsi author, "the Moorish civilisation was an efflorescence produced by the fertilising waters of Sassanian erudition".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P. Kershasp—*Studies in Iranian History*, p. 75.

8. Coming nearer to the East we find that the Persian Light reached modern Afghanistan and Baluchistan long before the Greeks occupied those territories in the third century B.C. Bactria and Sistan were parts of the Persian Empire. The cities of Balkh, Samarkand and Sistan saw the splendours of Iran's early sovereigns. The Achaemenians then extended their territories as far as Gandhara (modern Kandahar), the Punjab and even to Sind; and when Alexander crossed the Hindu-Kush and passed through the Khyber Pass, he left a Greek satrapy called Bactria behind him. The Mahommedan conquest of Persia in the seventh century A.D. repeated the story of conversion in all these provinces. The Amirs of Afghanistan may well be proud of their Persian ancestors—Noshervan, Khusroe and Shahpur.

9. Scholars in the past and archæologists like Dr. Spooner have been able to trace the

Persian influence right up to the Jhelum. Taxila, then the capital of North India, possesses ruins which give us a link with Greek and Persian art in their artistic architectural designs. The excavations at Pataliputra, displaying a palace similar to the one at Persepolis, have been the subject of very diverse opinions; but they too bear ample testimony to the adoption of Persian art, if not of Persian religion.

Later on, in Sassanian times, Sind came closer to Persia, and the story of Buzorch Meher, who solved the puzzle of the Indian game of chess, is popular among educated Parsees. A Pahlavi inscription in the Canary Caves, near Bombay, is a sterling proof of Persian influence extending as far as the Deccan. Even Dittenberger is of opinion that traces of Mithraic worship, in the third century B.C., are to be found in the North-West Provinces and Gujarat. The history of some of the old

cities in Sind and the Punjab shows what her Persian neighbours have done for India.

We have already noted that in the domain of painting also the Ancient Persians excelled. Professor Stezygowsky, in a lecture at the Victoria Museum in London, said that

by Northern art he meant the Iranian art which grew up under the influence of Mazdaism, that Iran was a centre from which had come the landscapes in the pictures from Italy, India and China, and the mosaics of Rome and Ravenna, the Ajanta frescoes and the pictures in the temple of Nara in Japan.

Mr. Dillon in his *Arts of Japan*, writes :

Nothing is more remarkable than the undoubted presence of Persian, more precisely Sassanian, motives in a considerable number of cases. . . . It is considered possible that the beginnings of Japanese art were strongly affected by Persian influences which are discernible in Kanaeka's pictures.

It is probable that this influence in the Far East was exerted through China.

10. Then came Asia's turn to deteriorate. In some mysterious way it began to sink, after the glories of the Arab, the Moghul and the Chinese periods. Asia has had its Dark Age ever since the formation of modern European history. It was the Crusades that brought Europe into touch with Asia. The discovery of the Cape of Good Hope by Vasco de Gama opened a new and convenient route for Europe to bring the Light of Learning again to the unhappy countries of Asia.

How far the descendants of the Ancient Persians have helped New India in her struggles for a renaissance will be shown in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PARSEES AND NEW INDIA

THE Parsees of to-day are the Parsees of the ages. For centuries they have been revolving round the Sun of Righteousness, always keeping to the path prescribed by their Polar Star, Zoroaster. For years they have been wearing the garland of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds, woven by their great Master in the dim historic past of Iran. Their Book of the Gathas never was, and never will be a sealed book ; inasmuch as it is a dynamic force that propels the spirit of the community towards the goal of immortality by the Prophet's Ladder of Perfection, and as its devoted chanters bask in the sunshine



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of the high ideals with which its verses overflow. Their Atashbeheram is not the spent energy of a "whimsical volcano," but it forms the very heart of the nation's spiritual system, accumulating and then discharging a life-giving stream from an inexhaustible store. Their Gushtasp and Rustom, their Darius and Ardesheer, their Doghdoe and Homae are not the weather-beaten sculptures of mythical artists; they are the sustaining victuals of good Parsee life and Zoroastrian brotherhood.

The Arabian conquest of Persia threw the Zoroastrians back into a pre-Kyanian state of existence and set the progress of the nation several thousand years backward. Homeless and powerless, they led a sort of nomadic life and retreated into Khorassan for about a hundred years. Pursued even there by their enemies, they at last emigrated to Ormuzd on the Persian Gulf and left their dear

Aryan home once for all. Fate then led them to form the plan of sailing to Hindustan, and re-joining their old Aryan brethren once more after the split in Iran.

Of the history of the Parsees in India there is no authentic record kept and we have to rely entirely on tradition. Scholars differ regarding the place of landing of the Parsee "pilgrim fathers" in India, some believing that the first batch of Zoroastrians must have come by land through the Panjab and Sind. It is however generally admitted that they lived at Div, in the south of Kathiawar, for nineteen years and from there made their last voyage to the coast of Gujarat. With divine aid in their tempest-tossed condition they reached Sanjan, near Daman, in the year A.D. 715. Jadi Rana was approached with a request to observe that in their religious practices and literature the Parsees were akin to Hindus, and to give them shelter

within his territories. The *Kissch-e-Sanjan* tells us in flowery Persian verse how, from that day, the Parsees adopted a good many Hindu customs, dress, manners, etc., and lived in peace for a time as farmers. In defensive warfare the Parsees helped their Hindu rulers, although they had forsworn the use of arms themselves.

Three hundred years of peace at Sanjan changed the very nature of the once war-like race of heroic Persians: but on account of their religious zeal they never lost their individuality, even in the vast expanse of India, where crores of *juddins* lived with but a few thousand Zoroastrians among them. But troubles came again; the Mohammedans in India would not leave them in peace. Mahmood Begada, Viceroy of Ahmedabad, sent General Aloof Khan with an army of 30,000 men against the Rana of Sanjan, and his loyal Parsee ryots helped him to the last.

The story is remarkable; 14,000 Zoroastrians once more enlisted themselves under their old Kavian banner, with Ardesheer, who secured an initial success but a final defeat. The Sacred Fire was then removed from the Barot hills and was installed for another twelve years in caves here and there near Bansda. Navsari, the present headquarters of the Parsee Priesthood, the Parsees reached in A.D. 1142; and about the year A.D. 1464 the Udwada Fire-temple—the Mecca of the modern Parsees—was erected with great éclat by the faithful. Even the roughest calculation shows that some Rs. 2,00,00,000 worth of sandal-wood must have been burnt on this king of Fires.

The heroism of the descendants of the “pilgrim fathers” is now and then shown in Indian history, for example in the defence of Variao, when the Rana of Ratanpore made a cowardly attack on the Parsee women,

who are said to have fought bravely against him in male attire. And even in later years the Parsees underwent other travails and difficulties, always, however, finding security on the firm rock of faith.

Such is the story of the Parsees of Gujarat till the end of the seventeenth century when the time came for them to rise slowly to power in the country. The British East India Company had just established factories at Surat and Bombay to which the Parsees of the neighbouring villages were soon attracted. They slowly left the ancestral art of agriculture and took to shipbuilding and other industrial pursuits, and also to trading with foreign countries. Their integrity, adventurous spirit, and religious zeal enabled them in a few years to win high honours from the British rulers of India. Ever since the bestowal of the title of Baronet on Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy the Parsees have been one of the most progressive

racés in India; and to India again they have repaid their old debt by taking a prominent part in Indian politics, Indian industry and commerce, in Indian education and, above all, in Indian social reforms, led by such well-known citizens as Dadabhoy Naoroji, Lovji Wadia, Pheroza Shah Mehta, and Behramji Malabari.

*India's Re-births.*—But to turn to the past of India for a while. It is true that she has had her life-waves. In the history of this ancient land of the Eastern Aryans, we get glimpses of her people's fond attachment to the wisdom of the Vedas, and to their Rishis; but as time passed they too moved away from the spirit of their scriptures and the "dark ages" resulted.

In the earlier epochs three huge waves of civilisation broke on the shores of India—one in the third century B.C., the period of Chandragupta and his illustrious son Asoka; another in the fourth century A.D. in the time of

Chandragupta Vikramaditya; and later, one more, in the sixteenth century, when the Emperor Akbar ruled.

The splendid architectural remains, showing Iranian and Greek influences now being excavated at Taxila, bear eloquent testimony to the new Buddhistic light in the life of India during the viceroyalty of Asoka in the North-West Frontier Provinces, and mark the Augustan age of Indian literature, art, law, science and metaphysics. After a low ebb for several centuries, about the year A.D. 320 again a new day dawned for India, and the veil of darkness was lifted up. The old magnificent cities of Pataliputra and Ayodhya—the home of Hindu learning—saw the crest of the second wave of an Indian renaissance which passed over the land of the Guptas and brought back the light of the Golden Age to Hindustan. Once again in the history of India there is one outstanding figure, Akbar—



the first and the last Indian Emperor—who helped forward the Indian revival in his time by sound political wisdom, magnanimity, salutary reforms and unique religious toleration and union. It is worthy of notice that even the Parsee Dastur, Meherji Rana of Navsari, was invited by Akbar to his learned Assembly for an exposition of the Zoroastrian religion, in which he was greatly interested.<sup>1</sup>

In subsequent ages other revival movements, religious and social, were made: by the Sikhs under Guru Govind Singh, who harmonised the rival religions of Hinduism and Islam in the Northern Provinces; by the Sufis of Sind, who gave quite a revivifying and unifying tone to the Aryan and the non-Aryan cults in the Western Provinces; and lastly by the Bengal philosophers who, after a thorough examination of Asian and European thought, tried to strike the

<sup>1</sup> Ref J. J. Modi's *The Parsees at the Court of Akbar*.

middle chord, and established the schools of the Arya- and Brahmo-Samaj in the Eastern provinces. Then again the Theosophical Society has done good service in this country, by diverting the minds of youthful Indians to the channels of Spiritual and Vedantic truths, and stopping the current of Materialism imported into India from foreign countries. To Adyar in the South, Young India always looks for the rich spiritual food which alone can save the "dying souls" in the modern world.

But the greatest impetus to India is the Britisher, valiant and free and forward, who with his characteristic powers has given a great impulse to the current of the twentieth century Indian renaissance. Before the advent of the British in India, the people were plunged in the atrocities of infanticide, homicide, sati, human sacrifices, caste distinctions, and foolish superstitions. At length a revival has come. As early as the year 1868, a Parsee

poet uttered quite prophetic words in the following soul-stirring lines :

Once blessed country, dost thou lie over-  
thrown ?

Are all thy laurels, triumphs, glories lost ?

Dost thou at last a sway exotic own ?

Is thy one god, thy ancient Aryan boast,

Upon the deep of dark oblivion tossed ?

Alas, poor land, what though fair pagodas  
rise

With towers and crests and slender spires  
embossed !

What though gay maids tricked idols solem-  
nise !

All show extern the inward blemish to  
disguise.

Raise, O raise this fallen land,

Turn the darkness into light,

Land that in compare could stand.

With the brightest of the bright.

O will India rise again,

Or are Britons come in vain ?

With the coming of the British to India in the seventeenth century there came into the land a new life, a re-vitalising current, which yielded good harvest in an astonishingly short time. And yet to the Indian mind Europe

did not really appear to be a synonym for true culture as it did at least to some other races. In India culture meant not inventions, discoveries, military organisations and physical comforts, but something divinely originated, humanely nourished and spiritually developed, something which marvellously unfolded the truly inherent genius of a race. Here are some of Dr. Rabindranath Tagore's inspiring words :

Our present age of Renaissance began its career with an exaggerated faith in the foreign and external, to find out at last that life is a process of constant unfolding, whose impulse comes from the centre of its own being. The West which at first drew us on to itself, has forcibly flung us back upon an intense consciousness of our personality. The breath of inspiration, coming from the West, has kindled the original spark in us into a flame that lay smothered in the ashes of dead habits and rigidity of traditional forms. This has been illustrated by the course our literature has taken, almost completely abandoning its earlier foreign bed and finding its natural channel in the mother-tongue.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R. Tagore—Introduction to the *Bengali Book of English Verse*,

Indeed the Renaissance in India has had its starting-point in the land of the Tagores, which has been amply testified by the preciousness of the Bengali literature and art poured into the cultural markets of India. This much to the credit of indigenous talent. But there is room in India yet for the white man. For the cause of India's uplift to-day there is another poet, an Irish enthusiast, whose words are also worth quoting here—Dr. James Cousins :

In my early youth, I began the practice of being in at the birth of various revivals ; and I thought I had reached the climax when I gave my share to the Celtic Renaissance, and, after dreaming dreams for sixteen years, wept to see the art we gave our hearts to make noble and true, dragged on an English music-hall stage to a depth lower than that of the red-nosed comedian. Then I came to India. I had a hope that there I should find an atmosphere consistent with the dignity of middle life and its symbols, and space and quiet in which one might hope to gather some reapings from the ploughings and sowings of the spring. I had figured to myself the literary and artistic traditions of India as

something settled and mellow that one could live with in ease and confidence as with a wise and gentle friend. I had thought of her philosophical certainties as of a house of rock in which the fuss and speculation of the West would find understanding and repose. Instead, I came upon the spirit of the Child Krishna and the energy of the Dancing Siva, and in less than six months I was up to the eyes in signs and tokens of a new life in literature, the arts, religion and national aspirations, movements that throw me back a quarter of a century in spirit, and leave me with the merest spectacular interest in grey hairs, and no shadow of the sentiment and superiority, that are the rewards of middle age. In spite of my suspicion, I have to accept the Renaissance in India. I have to declare that *India is awake*.<sup>1</sup>

God willing, India will thus again bloom out in its fullest splendour as it did in bygone days. The religious poetry of Rabindranath and other rising Indian poets; the rare productions of the new Bengali painters; the growing vernacular literatures after the significant contact with the West; the new dramas in

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Cousins—*The Renaissance in India* (Madras, 1918), pp. 4, 5, 6.

Telugu and Urdu; and the scholarly treatises on Indian Economics; the new life given to Indian music by societies like the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya; the opening of large industrial centres like Jamshedpur; and above all the awakening of national consciousness in Hindustan—these go to prove that a really powerful wave of new life has been passing over Bharatamata. No nation can however rise without the amelioration and education of its women. And it seems India's daughters are just beginning to feel the joys<sup>2</sup> of legitimate freedom. "At the present time," says Mrs. Cousins, "there is rising in the hearts of Asian womanhood a mighty wave of desire for freedom."<sup>1</sup> And so in India from the Punjab to Travancore and even in Burma women are astir, proclaiming their rights and giving their honest

<sup>1</sup> M. E. Cousins. *The Awakening of Asian Womanhood* (Madras, 1922), p. 1.

and legitimate share in the building of New India.

*The Share of the Parsees.*—With this great current of Indian regeneration, the little community of the Parsees is also to be carried along. The salvation of India depends upon a reconciliation of the aspirations of both the rulers and the ruled, and the time has come now when India will appreciate the share given to its growth by the Parsees. In words that ought to be familiar in every Parsee home, Sir Narayan Chandavarkar gave an eloquent tribute to the Parsees at the funeral of the late Grand Old Man of Political India :

Dadabhoy Navrojee belonged to the great Parsee community and if we take stock of his life and his example, may I not say with perfect justice and truth that in his career, in all he did, in all he suffered, and in all he taught, he was the Prophet Zoroaster's religion personified, incarnated, because he was the man more than anybody else of pure thoughts, of pure speech, of pure deeds—the sum and substance of Zoroastrian religion. Therefore it is



no exaggeration to say, it is not marring the beauty of the religion to say, that he was the second Zoroaster, sent to India to make the sun of righteousness and of India's future progress shine more and more by means of our pure thoughts, our pure speech and our pure deeds. Countrymen, not only the Parsees, but men of all races regarded Dadabhoy as their own. He went into the bosom of us all. His death is the greatest loss to us at the present time. And yet he is not dead. The sun that shone ninety-three years ago over India is set, but I say it is set to rise again in the form of *regenerated India*; for Dadabhoy lived and worked for us with a self-devotion which must remain for all of us an inspiring example. Let us, therefore, before we part, pledge ourselves that we will live by the light of his example, pure in all that we do, sacrificing ourselves for the sake of India, full of devotion and that marvellous patience which was the best adornment of Dadabhoy's great and sacred and worshipful life.

Dadabhoy Naorojee may also be said to be the father of Female Education in Bombay. Himself a product of the newly inaugurated Elphinstone Institution, he soon saw that, without the co-operation of an educated womanhood, his dreams of a free India could never be realised. He was lucky enough to see the

fruits of his labour in this direction in the foundation of the first girls' High School in Bombay. Other cities and towns followed suit, and it is interesting to notice that the oldest girls' school in India is at Navsari, the native place of many well-known Parsees.

Quite a legitimate tribute to another great Parsee, and consequently to the Parsee community, was recently given by no less a person than the Governor of Bombay, for the valuable work he did for Indian politics in general and for Bombay in particular. His Excellency said at the time of the unveiling of the statue of the late Sir Pherozeshah Mehta :

I think that upon me personally the most lasting impression to be gathered from his story is made by his wonderful political courage, particularly fascinating for its debonair quality and by his unshaken faith in the future of his country. He never seemed to follow anyone but took his own line across country. And because of the strength of that impression, for me the most alluring chapter in

his history is that which tells of the two great political struggles in which he mainly fought, the first in the political and the second in the municipal field of politics, in both of which he won so conspicuous a success. If it is not necessary, it can at least not be superfluous, to remind this audience of what must, I think, be considered perhaps the greatest example of the courage I have just alluded to, but also of practical and far-seeing statesmanship. It must be in your recollection that there was a time when a definite and stirring challenge was thrown down against constitutional methods in this country. To us who have passed through various phases of political agitation during recent times it may not be out of place to recall the strong lead which Sir Pherozeshah and his party gave in favour of constitutionalism, and the attainment of Dominion status through those methods and those methods alone.<sup>1</sup>

In the sphere of social service Byramji Malabari gave a valuable share with the help of his press, *The Indian Spectator* and *East and West*. He was loved not only by his countrymen for the reforms he introduced, the Age of Consent Bill, and the Widow

<sup>1</sup> Sir Pherozeshah M. Mehta Memorial ("Times" Press, Bombay, 1923), pp. 36, 37.

Remarriage programme, but also by the British and Native State rulers for the valuable part he played as an intermediary between them.

And no sane and patriotic Indian can refuse to give credit to Jamshedji Tata for creating an Industrial India in the present century. The Hydro-electric works at Lonavla, the Iron Works at Jamshedpur and the Research Institute at Bangalore, all due to his genius, are India's greatest industrial assets to-day.

*A Timely Warning.*—But it is doubtful if the ideals of such great Parsees of the past centuries are rigidly adhered to by the rising Parsee generation. As the Parsees were the first to be benefited by Western methods of learning, they are also the first to be affected by the current of materialism that has been brought here by Westerners. Indifference, scepticism and mammon-worship seem to be uppermost in the mind of the young Parsee to-day.

We also see the Parsee religion mostly practised in its outward forms, with a strict adherence to rituals while there is a total disregard of its main principles. The community is thus sharply divided into two conflicting classes. More than fifty thousand live in Bombay while an equal number is scattered over Gujarat, Sind and the Punjab. The gaities of great cities, with their gilded halls and luxurious cafés, have drawn the Zoroastrian protestants away from the sanctity of their Atashbeherams; the cigarette has replaced the sandalwood and the "cow's heel" turban has made room for the Ellwood hat; while in some quarters, even the women have a butterfly appearance, and take pride in talking French and English and in gaily attiring themselves in clothes, half-European and half-native in fashion and of foreign manufacture.

On the other hand, the orthodox Zoroastrians would not under any circumstances forget

their Avestan hymnals. They would enjoy the *Gahambar* and *Chaharrum* feasts to their hearts' content, and would regard their cocoanut sacrifices to the Ardui Sura Banoo, and rich *khajans* and *malida* during the holy days of Muktaḍ as the be-all and end-all of their Faith. While these are not ashamed of "going to the vultures" at last in the Tower of Silence, their own civilised brethren fight for the cremation of their dead.

The remedy lies with the priestly class; but it is strange that it also is in a miserable condition at present. The Behedins, or laymen, though more advanced than their spiritual leaders, have so far done little to educate the priests who, as descendants of the Persian Magi, still seem to be the sole possessors of the sacred lore. Some hope, however, is now held out, in the newly established Kama Athornan Institute in Bombay, for a young and

enlightened Parsee priesthood in the near future.

Towards the middle of last century, there was a revival of Zoroastrian letters in India, the late Mr. K. R. Cama with his six disciples taking a prominent part in it. The veteran knight turned quite a new page in Parsee history and a kind of Cama cult grew apace. But even that was not enough to improve the condition of the Parsee clergy; the fault lay chiefly with the laity who did not demand an intelligent priesthood to minister to their spiritual needs.

*If Zoroaster came back to-day, he would be surprised, nay pained, to see his race so much gone down, his gospel so much misunderstood, the printed page so much in view while the true Light of the Holy Word is so much ignored. Once the Parsees, one and all, endeavour to make the facts flash out their inner meaning, once they discover*

the real *Avesta* within the Avesta, they will surely regain hundreds of the misguided souls that the community is losing as active members. Then there would be no need for proselytism. The present is not a time favourable for proselytising the race. Rather there is needed real propaganda work among the Parsees themselves. There is also the need of officiating priests who may be hereditary, as well as of scholar-preachers who should be elected. To be a true Parsee it is necessary for one to carry forward the best of the Zoroastrian traditions, and then to move on with the times, constantly reconciling their spirit with the changing circumstances in which he may be placed.

In the absence of a learned Zoroastrian Episcopate, clever missionaries belonging to other alien creeds have been seeking opportunities to interpret the *Zend-Avesta* in their own peculiar way and to convert the Parsees,



if possible, to Christianity. Nothing can be more irreligious than this. Ahura Mazda is the wisest Being in the Universe, and He alone knows what spiritual food is necessary for a certain class of human beings in a certain age. The indefatigable and good-hearted Christian missionary, Dr. James Moulton, in his last book *The Treasure of the Magi*<sup>1</sup> endeavoured to prove that the Crown of Zoroastrianism was Christianity. Jesus Christ was for him the only light, and Christianity the most splendid viewpoint<sup>c</sup> from whence to look behind and beyond. He showed in the book the beauties of the Zoroastrian system, which then he could not dispute. He emphatically said that where Zoroastrianism ended Christianity began; he began and ended his thesis with the statement that in the Sage of Bethlehem

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Moulton—*The Treasure of the Magi*, (Religious Quest Series (Oxford Press, 1917).

the Parsees must needs find the promised Saoshyant. In fact, he would disbelieve the later *Avesta* at one time and believe it at another suitable one. He would at one moment warn us against the Buddha's asceticism and at the next would have us believe that "the way of renunciation is the way of highest good"! Zarathustra failed, he cried, because he stood pre-eminently for self-assertion and utterly repudiated ascetic life! He told us in so many words that the grandest thing which Zarathustra taught was how to live this earthly life completely, that he was a philosopher and at the same time advocated the principle of "work is worship" according to the *Vendidad*. And yet Dr. Moulton called the *Vendidad* a book of "silly rubbish". In one place he said that Zarathustra was tremendously in earnest and in the Gathas he saw "Truth with an intense clearness;" but in the next place he declared the Gathas "cold,"

and the Prophet not standing as one "among the goodly fellowship of the prophets for warmth and tenderness and passion". Zoroastrianism, in his opinion, failed; failed because it stood for self-assertion and not for self-renunciation; because it depended upon dead prophets and needed a living voice; because it inspired no successor or disciple, having no dynamic force to bring forth a revival and because Zarathustra did not *love* Ahura Mazda! Enough has been said in the present book to refute all these statements and it now rests with the community and its preachers, teachers and editors to educate the Parsee youth in the sacred lore, and arm them against such unjust and unjustifiable critics of their Faith.

*National Education.*—In the sphere of education also the modern Parsees have not done their best. When the bright taper of Western education was held before the eyes of Indians

in the last centuries, the Parsee pioneers came forward first as University men and then as public citizens. The brilliant sons of the priestly class, who left their ancestral vocation, stood high in public examinations at a time when other communities were backward. Now in this country, when every race is awakening to its national consciousness and competition is inevitable, the Parsees are bound to be affected. It is now rare to find Parsee youths topping the lists of public examination results. A few well-to-do Parsees send their boys to Europe and America only to return as barristers-at-law or doctors of medicine or philology. But the mass of the community is not receiving the education that is really needed to-day. All the glory of Persia in the past was due to the remarkable and typical Persian education. Once the culture is withdrawn, the growth is arrested; and here we are to-day confronting the problem of

Parsee poverty, although as many lacs of rupees are given away every two years in charity as there are members of the community.

What, then, are the causes of such poverty? Neglect of national education, lack of synthetic moral and religious teaching, severance of religious rites from daily life, preference for foreign literature, want of home-training, the haste and impatience of passing through public examinations, sheer boredom and fruitless private tuition, and lastly, want of manual training—these have checked the progress of Parsee national education. Our young boys and girls are not all taught to appreciate our past. They have not the faintest idea of the beauties of their own sacred and secular literatures. They know much about Napoleon and Nelson, Washington and Irving, but little about Gushtasp and Noshervan, Darius and Khushroo and Behram, and about the Petits, the

Readimonies, the Banajis, the Bengalis and the Sethnas. How can their purely secular training benefit them and stimulate their life?

A warning note has already been sounded in Parsee schools regarding the poor physique of the pupils. Luxury may be one of the causes, but little has yet been done to improve the system of physical culture and to introduce the studies of physiology and hygiene, manual training and scouting.

In our primary schools the greatest impediment to our children is the vernacular series, which does not mean for them the study of their mother-tongue but Sanskritised Gujarati. In the middle and high schools there is a scarcity of good and devoted teachers. On the other hand the real Indian teacher is almost starved in this country, education not being a profession or a career. Not till we secure educationalists with enthusiasm and ideals, and not till we realise that the school-master is the

thermometer of the country's intellectual heat, and the barometer of its social and spiritual pressure—not till then shall we be able to withstand the ever-advancing wave of poverty and dissatisfaction face to face. Even in higher education, very little scientific, industrial and technical work is done by the Parsees, and in commerce they are allowing their trade to pass to their alien neighbours.

The Parsees have established many hospitals, poor chawls and sanatoriums, but few institutions of their own in which the young and growing children can be taught how not to fall ill and how to earn a decent living for themselves. The idea of a Central Parsee College is yet in the air, and no efforts have been made to start a central boarding-house or institute.

The Press in every land and for every good cause is a great blessing in the twentieth century; and yet the Parsee Press, with some

notable exceptions, is anything but desirable. It cultivates the art of reviling individuals and pampering prejudiced leaders ; it unfortunately and unconsciously sets a bad example to the very youth whom we want to educate. Truth, for which Zarathustra pined so much and so long, has yet to be dug out by the modern followers of the Light of Iran.

One of the marked characteristics of the growing Parsee boys and girls is their restless and emotional spirit. This mercurial temperament can only be poised by a careful attention to the cultivation of fine arts. "A nation without art is blind and dumb" is a wise observation. With scanty extant literature of their own the Parsees have already become dumb, and without a taste for the fine arts—painting, poetry, music, sculpture, etc.,—they will soon grow blind as well. Their homes must resound with the elevating strains of Zoroastrian hymns and Persian songs and with



the thrilling recitals of heroic tales from the *Shah Nameh*. In their drawing-rooms must hang pictures of their classical heroes and soul-elevating scenes by their ancient artists; and the architecture of their temples must be characterised, like the Mahommedan mosques and Christian churches, by a definite pattern. These should surely bear a truly Parsee stamp and determine their national environment, national temperament and national direction.

*National Purpose.*—But the greatest defect of present-day Parsee education is the disregard the community has shown for its national purpose. There is no definite object for which education is taken or demanded. Taking the term education in its broadest sense, we should first of all decide the direction in which its currents should constantly flow. Every nation has a national purpose of its own. A nation dies when the main purpose of its

life is expended. A nation lives as long as it obeys the law of its national purpose. In the West to-day "aggrandisement" forms the pillar of the German nation; "independence" is the back-bone of the French; while "give and take" is the pivot on which the British character turns. But in the Eastern world and especially in India the national purpose is "spiritual freedom". The real food for the soul of a nation is its philosophy, and philosophy has been the life-force of this land for thousands of years. While in Europe, since the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, philosophy has lost its hold on the various nations; in India, religion means everything, and philosophy, life and religion have always gone hand in hand. For this reason, while Europe may be said to be dissatisfied with itself, India still, on account of its spiritual independence, breathes in peace and in contentment. On account of this it

has been said that India's philosophy has kept it backward in the world ; but India with its comparative poverty and backwardness still lives, because its philosophy is deep-rooted and because its head is ever crowned with high spiritual ideals. If the Parsees are desirous of maintaining their unique position as intermediaries between the East and the West, they should never lose sight of their own national purpose. In fact, the national purpose of the Parsees for one thousand and two hundred years in India was "Forward with Fire". It is absolutely necessary that this principle should be maintained with pious care by the community ; and that, with material progress, they should always be awake to the political, social and spiritual needs of a growing race. They should carry the torch of righteousness, honesty and purity forward into the field of all their worldly activities and progress.

*The Parsees and Persia.*—Side by side with this we desire a Parsee colony in Persia, preferably at Shiraz. For the re-union of the two existing branches of the Zoroastrian nation in India and in Persia it is essential for the Parsees to extend a helping hand to the Iranis. Missions of a varied nature, medical help, educational institutions, famine and other relief funds and, lastly, commercial connections should be established. They can no longer afford to be indifferent towards their Zoroastrian brethren in Modern Persia. Not only the people but also the historic buildings and monuments in ruined Iran claim the attention of the well-to-do Parsees of India. The words of a recent lady traveller through Persia are worth quoting here :

In Persepolis as well as here (in Ctesiphon) there are signs of underground chambers in the palaces. There have been no excavations in the neighbourhood. Over this capital city (of Ctesiphon or Tak-e-Kesra) there once flew the Iranian flag ;

but now only a small portion of the palace is to be seen here. It is quite natural that historic treasures must be lying buried in the adjoining plain and awaiting their discoveries by archæologists. But before we are prepared for such an undertaking, the least that we should do forthwith is to save the remains from further destruction. The structure is built of bricks and is now slowly crumbling; the plaster from the walls is coming off and hundreds of sparrows and bats are living in the nests within the holes of the walls. There is great need for repairs to prolong the life of this part of the palace which stands to-day to remind us of Sassanian splendour. This is not an easy task—and yet no wealth and labour should be spared to save the little that is left of our old relics from further ruin. It is high time the community should become conscious of this need.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cooverbai Maneckji Dhalla: *Travels in Iran and Irak*—Gujarati, (Karachi, 1922), p. 142.

## CONCLUSION

THE Light of Ancient Persia was the light of Truth and Love and Hope.

Truth, as conceived by Zarathustra in the Law of Asha, was at the root of all divine creations; truth in the formation of the myriads of heavenly bodies performing their ceaseless devotional revolutions round the parent luminaries; truth in all nature's operations, its seasonal growth and decay; truth in the air, in the waters, in the trees, the flowers and the fruits; truth, above all, in the making of the Almighty's highest creature—man. Love was in all truthful objects; Love went wherever Truth went. Zarathustra loved Ahura Mazda only because He never offered a wholesale forgiveness of

sins with the interference of a borrowed redeemer, because He was so full of truth and law and order Himself. He could not Himself break the Law of Asha, when the cries and lamentations of the oppressed *Geush Urva* (Soul of the Universe) reached His ears, when the world went wholly wrong. Love was in all animate as well as inanimate objects. Love magnetised the atoms in matter and kept humanity in a sacred bond of friendship or relationship. Love blossomed in the scented rose of Iran and perfumed the air in the Atashkadehs of great Persian kings. It tuned the throats of the mating *bulbuls* and quenched the thirst of suffering lovers. And lastly, there is not a page of the extant *Avesta* which does not breathe out the breath of Hope. No prophet was so optimistic as Zarathustra Spitama; his very life was passed in expectations of a day when his dreams of a world-renovation could be fully realised.

Hope also inspired the Iranian heroes in the days of their adversity or prosperity ; and hope still keeps up the spirit of the Parsee community in spite of all the signs of deterioration in the twentieth century, in spite of physical, mental and moral poverty, of the ugly ghosts of semi-lies in which the world takes pride, of the wretched art of dissimulation and of the tormenting of God's good, truthful and dutiful but quiet souls.

This Light shone through many centuries and in many phases ; and it is easy to see from the foregoing pages that the world has been the better for that Light. The Lamp may be withdrawn for a time and carried to another quarter where it is more needed ; but its rays can never be altogether removed from our midst. Beneath our horizon it may have gone to-day, but the twilight will end and there is a possibility that the Light will flash across the Eastern skies once more, and once



more the world will find solace and peace and joy underneath the One Lamp.

With that (Glory) the world shall be made fresh, not old, not mortal, not bad, not decaying, but ever living, ever profiting, ever self-governing. The dead shall all revive. The era of immortality shall come. The earth shall be refashioned according to its own sweet will. The creations of holiness that are profitable and of the corporeal world shall be lasting.<sup>1</sup>

This is the New Age of the victorious Saoshyant promised to mankind in Ancient Persia. In this age matter shall melt into spirit and body into soul. The soul shall be no longer mocked, and no longer regarded as a fiction but as a fact. It shall have all its triumphs in the material world at last.

How often has man laughed at the very belief in a "soul"? It is enough, the materialists say, if men live a healthy and happy life on this earth—there is no need to bother about the rewards or punishments of an imaginary "soul" in an imaginary world.

<sup>1</sup> Jamyad Yasht, §§ 11, 12.

And even if it is acknowledged that the soul exists, there are those who assert that it does not matter if it is lost while the whole world is gained. Recollect the wise words of Zarathustra spoken to the Devil who tempted him with the gain of the whole world: "Never shall I forsake the true faith, never, even though my bones, my brain and my soul should fall asunder."<sup>1</sup>

In all that we think, in all that we speak and in all that we do, spirit must be the guide and not matter. It will not profit us if we are merely healthy, or merely wealthy or strong, and the soul is starved.

Man, again, must have a goal in life to reach. All human aspirations are only the "flights of the soul" towards the goal of the Highest Light. Without such good and high aspirations man is no better than a beast. Man above all other creatures has the very

<sup>1</sup> *Vendidad*, xix, 7.

breath of God breathed into his body, and it is the soul that Zarathustra is bent on developing, as long as soul and body are linked together by destiny.

\* \* \* \*

Let us, then, rise and give offerings to the Angel of Light, not only of cultured brains but also of cultivated hearts and purified souls. Let us not only open our eyes and ears, but also illumine our hearts and souls with that Light. The Parsee community—the inheritors, if not the monopolists, of the Light to-day—with its glorious past and its hope for an equally glorious future may be likened to a lake of classic beauty, separated and isolated from its fountain-head of great sanctity, lost in the sands of a strange land. Let all of us put our hands and heads together and stimulate its out-flow once more towards the safe and cherished goal—ETERNAL BLISS•AND EVER-LASTING LIGHT!

# ERRATA

| PAGE    | LINE         | FOR                    | READ                            |
|---------|--------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 4, 5, 9 |              | Zarthusstra            | Zarathustra                     |
| 10      | (Footnote 3) | Bundhaism              | Bundahishn                      |
| 51      | 9            | trained                | strained                        |
| 58      | 17           | Khordar                | Khordad                         |
| 73      | 19           | Mshyai                 | Mashyai                         |
| 86      | 16           | wood                   | impure wood                     |
| 95      | 15           | hener                  | heher                           |
| 99      | 9            | twenty-two             | twenty-one                      |
| 106     | 10           | Berezisanvang          | Berezisavang                    |
| 107     | 14           | Mehr                   | Meher                           |
| 111     | 8            | Tisame                 | Tilsame                         |
| 119     | 6            | Varasi                 | Varasia                         |
| 120     | 15           | Na 2 Co 3              | Na <sub>2</sub> Co <sub>3</sub> |
| 136     | 10           | mitigated <sup>b</sup> | mitigated <sup>a</sup>          |
| 170     | 10           | 487                    | 483                             |
| 173     | 7            | Puranmikht             | Puramidokht                     |



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